MRS. SIDDONS





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85





MEMOIRS

OF

MRS. SIDDONS

INTERSPERSED WITH ANECDOTES OF

AUTHORS AND ACTORS

By JAMES BOADEN

WITH PORTRAITS

PHILADELPHIA

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INTRODUCTION

THE elegant author of the Memoir on Italian Tragedy has mentioned, to the honour of the City of Verona, that it celebrated the various merits of Maffei during the lifetime of that great poet. On his return to his native city after a short absence, that nobleman found his bust placed over the principal entrance of the Philharmonic Academy, with the following inscription on the pedestal :—

MARCHIONI SCIPIONI MAFFEI VIVENTI,
ACADEMIA PHILHARMONICA
DECRETO ET ÆRE PUBLICO
ANNO MDCCXXVII.

Although nothing could surpass the amiable virtues of his private character, this tribute of a poetical society was doubtless paid to him who sustained the tragic fame of his country.

It is on the same ground that I pay the present tribute to Mrs. Siddons.

But there was an additional motive that weighed with me in the latter case—That the actor can expect but little from the honours of time. The

dying author leaves behind him, perhaps, immortal writings to bear his name, and secure to it a just veneration and gratitude. Not so the living organ of his success upon the theatre. Flaminia, who acted the Merope of Maffei, is known to the world by the slight record of Rousseau ; who mentions her talents in general terms, but supplies no minute description of their effect.

On this subject my predecessor in stage history, Cibber, has the following brief but beautiful expressions of regret :—

'Pity it is that the momentary beauties flowing from an harmonious elocution cannot, like those of poetry, be their own record! That the animated graces of the player can live no longer than the instant breath and motion that presents them ; or, at best, can but imperfectly glimmer through the memory or imperfect attestation of a few surviving spectators.'

It would be an injury alike to the author of *The Careless Husband* and the author of *The School for Scandal* to withhold from the reader's comparison the above reflections, expanded in the exquisite verses of Sheridan :—

'The actor only shrinks from Time's award ;
Feeble tradition is his memory's guard ;
By whose faint breath his merits must abide,
Unvouch'd by proof, to substance unallied !
The grace of action,—the adapted mien,
Faithful as nature to the varied scene ;
Th' expressive glance, whose subtle comment draws
Entranc'd attention, and a mute applause ;

Gesture that marks, with force and feeling fraught,
A sense in silence, and a will in thought ;
Harmonious speech, whose pure and liquid tone
Gives verse a music scarce confess'd its own ;
Passion's wild break—and frown that awes the sense,
And every charm of gentler eloquence,—
All perishable ! like the electric fire,
But strike the frame, and as they strike expire.'

But, however failing the memory of such graces, and however imperfect the attestation of the surviving spectator, this should be remembered—'spirits are not finely touched but to fine issues'—effects, recent from their causes, submit those causes to analysis, to examination, to description. Some art is, moreover, acquired in the practice of painting our impressions ; and we shall always communicate by our touch some of the electric fire which we have received. It is, therefore, gratitude to the actor and duty to the public to perpetuate the character of excellence, and afford models for imitation to future artists.

This is not, however, a task for every hand, nor for all periods of our existence. We must finish the sketches of our refined pleasures while their impressions are yet vivid, before we are past our full power, whatever measure may have been allotted to us.

Dr. Johnson has said that 'a whole life cannot be spent upon syntax and etymology.' Yet the interest of language must be confessed to be lasting. But what apology would suffice for him who should confine himself even to rational amusements in a life full of difficulties and of duties ?

But though, in the language of Shakespeare's Ferdinand, I may say—

'The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead,
And makes my labours pleasures';

though such an occupation as mine constitute the highest charm of retirement, 'to live over again the most agreeable portion of life,' yet I must not conceal from the reader, what I cannot but feel myself, the powerful admonitions of time—

'Cynthius aurem
Vellit et admonuit';—

that my records, of whatever value, could not be longer delayed; that the evening of my day was fully come, 'and the night was at hand, when no man can work.'

I therefore resolved to commit to the press, without further delay, all that forty years of observation had collected relative to the stage; and to give to my work the chronological form of Memoirs. Part of my plan I have executed in the Life of my late friend Mr. Kemble, which has been received by every description of readers with a degree of favour of which I may reasonably be proud: they have placed it, where it was my ambition it should be, next to the delightful *Apology* of Colley Cibber; the distance, however, the vanity of an author may somewhat abridge. What remains seemed to reduce itself naturally to the period which has been adorned by the amazing talent of his sister, Mrs. Siddons; accordingly it is under the title of Memoirs of that lady's professional life that I deliver this, my con-

clusive work upon the stage. I had, I confess, the ambition to show that I could finish a suitable companion to the portrait which I had exhibited of Mr. Kemble ; and as in the brother I found the greatest actor of his time, so in the sister I possessed, in all probability, the greatest actress of any times. Nor did I shun the question as to the propriety of estimating her pretensions while living. Mrs. Siddons has, however honoured, long existed as a private member only of the community—and it is the life which she has already closed which alone it would become me to write. I have no motive whatever to draw me aside from a level consideration of her merits. I estimate them, seeking no favour, and certainly fearing no displeasure. The task, if at all to be performed by me, must be executed now.

Nor can I properly, on such a theme, defer to 'younger strengths.' They who have only witnessed the force retained in her decline have no conception of the tenderness which was once equally transcendent. So almost exclusively was her latter period devoted to characters of strength and majesty, that it became, among recent spectators, a question whether the pathetic was ever equally in her range —a notion that could never have been entertained but that Lady Macbeth, and Queen Katharine, and Volumnia, and Elvira had effaced the recollections of the Isabella, the Shore, the Belvidera, the Euphrasia even of her middle life; but it was in her three first seasons, or from her twenty-seventh to her thirtieth year, that the utmost pathos prevailed ; for

this many reasons might be assigned, but they are too obvious not to strike every intelligent observer of human nature.

But supposing that, as my contemporary, I had a chance of surviving the admirable lady in question, what larger field would be opened by her death?[1] Her private life! What is there, then, in the private life of the most excellent wife, mother, sister, friend, the detail of which could be interesting to the public? The duties of such a character are unobtrusive, unostentatious, and avoid the pen of history. They confer the best of blessings; but they shun all record and reward, save the internal consciousness which renders every other, in this life, of little moment. I am not of a nature to pry into family papers for 'secrets better hid.' No reproach shall ever assail me for having forgotten the delicacy with which a sex that it is our interest to hold sacred should for ever be treated.

By delaying this publication, therefore, I could derive no advantages, and must certainly lose some that I possess. I should, in a few years, look in vain around me for those who alone can be competent to judge of the resemblance of my portrait—those, too, who feel the strongest interest in the original. I now appeal to them to attest my veracity, and I hope their only surprise will be to find their own feelings so truly divined, and, perhaps, not imperfectly rendered.

[1] [Mrs. Siddons died at her residence in Upper Baker Street on June 8, 1831. Her biographer's decease occurred in 1839.]

Another object strongly urged me to immediate publication—the present condition of the Drama itself. We surely cannot hide from ourselves that it has declined to a state disgraceful to the high character of the country. What so fitted to recall us to better things as the progress of a great genius in her art, the display of whose inimitable powers necessarily involved those of our great dramatic poets? But I have been careful never to mistake the priestess for the source of her inspiration. All the eloquence of her utterance, all the magic of her eye, have never made me for a moment indifferent to the fame of those who created the characters, endowed them with manners and sentiment, and which she graced, I admit, with congenial beauty and grandeur and energy and passion.

Nor should the reader complain that the common measure of quotation is somewhat extended in the present work. Whoever attempts to paint the momentary beauties of elocution and personal expression must ask aid from the exact language uttered; the reference from the actor to the poet is perpetual. Nor should Alcides be beaten by his page. In exemplifying the charms of the great actress I have selected much of the most perfect composition in our language. But I confess that I do so with a feeling kindred to that of Hamlet, when he displays to the alarmed Queen, his mother, the portraits of her past and present husband—

'This *was* your husband: look you now what follows.'

The period between the first season of Mrs. Siddons at Drury Lane Theatre and her return, in 1782, I have reviewed with some care, because I would have it possess its portion of entertainment, and I know not where any tolerable record of it is to be found. The absence of Mrs. Siddons for six years from the capital may perhaps remind the reader of the retirement of Achilles from the field before Troy when insulted by Agamemnon. But the Father of Poetry was able to compensate the absence even of Achilles, and the very catalogue of the Grecian commanders and their ships is relieved or invigorated by so many sparkling touches of genius, that in no part of the divine *Iliad* does he more decidedly demonstrate his immense superiority over his imitators.

> 'Such bliss to one alone,
> Of all the sons of soul was known,
> And Heaven and Fancy, kindred powers,
> Have now o'erturn'd th' inspiring bowers,
> Or curtain'd close such scene from every future view.'

My work is of a nature to rest entirely upon the accuracy and ability of its author. I could receive but little aid, if I had sought any: my love for the subject has never wearied in the task, and I presume to say that a more faithful record will not easily be found.

It may be necessary to add, in justice to the admirable actress herself, that she has never seen one line of these papers while the author was

engaged upon them, and I can only hope that she will not be offended when they ultimately are offered to her notice. They who know Mrs. Siddons will acquit her of the indelicacy of suggesting her own praise, in the most remote, or indeed any manner.

Although, perhaps, it may be always impossible to conciliate the differences of critical opinion, yet I have not been indifferent to any liberal remarks upon my former work. One benefit I perceive myself to have derived—the present subject is better held together; it has more unity, though I trust it is still sufficiently diversified to be entertaining.

Such as it is, it is submitted implicitly and cheerfully to the candour and justice of the public. I cannot be said to have hurried rashly before them; for, although many trifles escaped from the literary ardour of my youth, more than sixty years had passed over my head before I had courage to venture the *justum volumen*, and behold what Dr. Johnson called a bound book lettered with my name.

J. B.

60 WARREN STREET, FITZROY SQUARE,
1st Dec. 1826.

MEMOIRS OF MRS. SIDDONS

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY but seldom selects its ornaments from the gentler sex. Women are devoted as much by nature as custom to the domestic duties. Their merits are to be felt in their homes and in their offspring; if the former be well ordered, and the latter well bred, the charm of both may without hesitation be ascribed to the mistress and the mother.

The wide range of male ambition but rarely tempts the modest reserve of our females. The hereditary principle, so startling in theory, so salutary in its results, has sometimes placed our women upon the throne; and their wisdom or their virtue (gallantry, perhaps morals, would combine the terms) commonly rendered their reigns memorable, not only for the doubtful advantages of conquest, but the solid triumph in the happiness of their people.

The display of the beauty and the accomplishments of the sex in a station so exalted has seldom, I think, been viewed with envy:—yet in the walks of literature the female is distinguished with rather unwilling admiration. She who yields to a powerful impulse, and indulges either her fancy or her wit, with difficulty escapes from the reproach of pedantry; and is suspected to resign, for literary distinction, much of her proper charm, that graceful modesty, which retires from even praise itself too vehemently pronounced. She is, therefore, generally contented to abstain from many subjects perfectly suited to her power, and allows to the bolder sex the mental ascendancy which might

frequently admit of dispute, and not seldom admits indeed of no dispute.[1]

The progress of refinement has thrown the stage open to a competition of the two sexes, and often inscribed a female name in the highest rank of theatrical merit. The author of *The Sublime and Beautiful* has found no difficulty in commemorating Mrs. Siddons even with Garrick himself.

But this field of competition in mimetic excellence was opened to the ladies by growing laxity of manners. The greatest period of the English drama witnessed no female performer on a public stage. We were indebted to the recall of the Stuarts for abolishing the absurdity of constituting boys the representatives of female character. But a great deal was to be done before the timid and puritanic manners of the previous age could endure, much less sustain, the public exposure of the sex. The example of the court at length relaxed the general manners of the people, and virtue became an unheeded sacrifice, after the exterior guards of decorum were removed. To sit through the indecencies of the modern comedy became a favourite pastime; and some were found capable of hearing them without a mask. The actresses of that day were usually the avowed mistresses of profligate courtiers, and supported unabashed, and with infinite gaiety, their full share in the impure colloquies of the drama. In truth there has at all times been rather a close alliance of this nature between the parties here alluded to. And if it were not a fact, it would be an elegant symbol, when it is said of Pompey's Theatre, 'that the seats of the spectators were the steps to the temple of Venus.' Thus the first exposure of the person was accompanied by the attendant corruption of the mind; and the lesson of loose feeling was delivered, by the applauded wanton of the stage, to the ears of youthful inexperience, and awakened passion. At all events the mask would conceal alike the rising blushes, or the want of them.

[1] On this subject, Dr. Fiddes laments that there should be no foundations for the female sex—'Which,' says he, 'allowing to them the same advantage of education as men, would certainly be equal to them, if not in the strength of their minds, yet in the beauty and delicacy of their thoughts: and in several of the more liberal and polite parts of learning, would make a readier progress, and probably arrive at length to a greater perfection than is common to men.'—*Life of Wolsey*, p. 114.

The British Juvenal touched this 'smiling mischief' with his venerable hand, and devoted it to scorn or to oblivion:

> 'For Shame regain'd the post by sense betray'd,
> And Virtue call'd oblivion to her aid.'

With the growing purity of the stage, a corresponding delicacy, or at least decency, was observable in its professors. A woman of virtue might there be found, however greatly admired; and a bold and caustic satirist[1] at least amended what his avowed object was to destroy. The ingenuous Dryden bowed at his reproof, and perhaps struggled after purer composition. The improvement of manners to which I have alluded was favourable to the female professors of the stage. They changed the sex of their patrons, and were frequently received in the best society. All the refinements of rank and education were open to their remark and to their imitation. They soon dropped the swelling pretensions of the princess for the gentle grace of modest, but reflecting, virtue. The authors followed in the train of society, which they ought always to have conducted, and disdained any longer to pollute their scenes with the open avowal of female dishonour.

But, as comedy was thus interdicted the daring stratagems of vice, and many of the dilemmas to which they conducted, so it lost the gay flutter of wit, by which a set of specious but loose manners was rendered often triumphant and always dangerous. Yet interest in the drama was necessarily to be found, and instead of unmasking the base and punishing the profligate, the new school precipitated the innocent into unmerited distress and, having through four acts wound calamity about the heroine as a garment, employed a scene or two of the fifth in natural or unnatural expedients of relief, and some times exceeded even the demands of tragedy in the tears excited by repentance or magnanimity.

There is hardly to be found in the history of human taste a change so rapid and entire as appeared in the thirty years which elapsed between the composition of *The Double Dealer* of Congreve and *The Conscious Lovers* of Steele.

[1] Collier.

The Lady Touchwood of Congreve is a Messalina, whose avowed profligacy (for she talks of her own dishonour to Maskwell) is not even lowered to the use of comedy by becoming ridiculous. I say to the use of comedy, because perhaps at a certain age the tender passion entertained for improper objects, viewed as a folly rather than a crime, may become the lawful prey of the comic muse. But unless thus covered with ridicule as unsuited to the parties, it should never be exhibited on the stage, merely because the poetic justice of the catastrophe punishes it as immoral. The indecency of such an interest should banish it from every well regulated play-house. The grosser vices of our natures may sometimes form subjects for the tragic muse; and they then need every artifice of the poet to keep them from exciting disgust instead of dread. It is for this reason that Phedra, as a subject, is banished from the English stage, though tolerated upon the French. I am happy, in estimating the comparative purity of the two nations, to give the palm of virtue to the audiences of my own country. In the case of Phedra, the French, in compliment to the Greek Euripides or their own,[1] while there can be found an actress to sustain the character, will continue to endure the display of an incestuous love. It should be remembered here, that they do so without the palliative of Greek fatalism. The displeasure of a Deity towards a particular race devoted its members to a long succession of inevitable crimes. An Athenian audience, in full assent to this feeling, saw the guilt of Œdipus and Phedra and Orestes with a measure of pity, which in ourselves it cannot excite.

As we approach to the stage of our own times, it may readily be imagined that its purity would not at all suffer under the direction of Mr. Garrick. Himself the greatest of all actors, he would naturally turn in the first instance to the compositions best suited to his own powers. To be her universal representative was conferred upon him by nature; and he discovered in the page of Shakespeare the only inspiration adequate to his talents. If nature wrote through Shakespeare, the poet in his turn spoke best through Garrick. By this it is not meant that an occasional passage,

[1] Racine—Compare him particularly in the *Phèdre* and *Iphigénie*.

sometimes perhaps an entire character, was not better given by another actor—these are the dreams of the fanatic, who invests his idol with uniform transcendence—but that he was, on the whole, more congenial with the soul of Shakespeare; penetrated like him the secret of the passions; unfolded like him the infinite diversities of character; and, if I may glance at Dr. Johnson's praise of Shakespeare himself, might have been our ambassador to a new found continent, to exhibit there all the feelings and manners of our own.

It was often supposed that this great actor was cold as to contemporary writers. But their productions do not convict him of bad taste; on the contrary, they demonstrate his judgment to have been all but infallible. Fully possessed with the genuine fire of Shakespeare, he must have often read with regret, probably contempt, the bald versions from the French which were tendered to him as almost original compositions. I take upon me to say that in no instance whatever, when transferring Voltaire to the English stage, has any Murphy or Hill, either for the purpose of concealment or improvement, dared to take the coxcomb departure from the original that distinguishes the counterfeits of Shakespeare upon the French stage. To these mere translators of the plays of other countries Mr. Garrick must have borne but little reverence, and he could have been expected but occasionally to attend to them at all. His rejection or indifference, his doubt or his delay, were at such times assailed by every description of influence. Some noble lord, an undoubted judge of the subject, some high-born dame, accustomed to the empire of fashion, was soon desirous of seeing Mr. Garrick upon the offered drama; and a real, often a simulated, deference was expressed by the manager to the patron about a matter which concerned his own interest, and could properly be submitted only to his own judgment. To yield to a rage for incessant novelty is to insure the destruction of the Drama, by inviting everything that is unnatural in interest and loose and trashy in language.

Fortunately for Mr. Garrick, the revivals of our own stock of sterling plays, aided by his wonderful talent, kept up a steady attraction to his theatre, sufficient for his fame

and his profit. He had engaged in no rash speculation, which was to be sustained by unusual receipts—(a fatal measure of present supply and future exhaustion)—he therefore quietly proceeded in his certain course, and gradually became wealthy. To the moral purity of his stage this great man paid the proper attention. There was little obnoxious in our best dramatic works, which might not be omitted without loss to the scene, or softened without injury to the dialogue. If new and commanding genius arose among us, the manager was ready to foster and applaud it; if not, the fund of merits accumulated by past geniuses was, in a catholic sense, inexhaustible, and available as our own.

We are often compelled to admire the fortunate concurrence of events attending particular persons. It was a happiness for the subject of these memoirs to have been born in the exact position of life, and at the precise time she was. Somewhat earlier, her correct feeling might have kept her from the stage, though the true sphere of talents like hers: it indeed affords the only public display of female eloquence. She started as an actress when the profession did not disgrace a woman of virtue. Becoming early attached to a man of the most honourable and steady character, the incense offered to her beauty did not disturb her peace. The talents of this great woman are said to have been slowly developed, and the growing claims of her family seemed to be the only unresisted calls upon her genius. At length fully kindled, it burst forth with a brilliancy that, in her own sex, had never been witnessed, and rivalled in its charm the spell of the great enchanter Garrick in all but his universality.

It is often incident to those who themselves illustrate a family to be desirous of deriving lustre from their ancestors. The unquestioned superiority of mental power covets a descent marked by rank and wealth and virtue, and indulges the love of self in the commemoration of others to whom it boasts even a remote, often a doubtful, alliance. Mr. Gibbon has occupied three and twenty pages in tracing his family in the weald of Kent, where they held land in the

year 1326, and he is proud that it could supply a Marmorarius or an architect to our Edward the Third. The family of Kemble may, for aught I know, have similar honours to boast; but in the management of a company of travelling comedians, such vanity is little likely to court the attention, and Mr. Roger Kemble seemed perfectly free from vanity of every kind. He appears to have been greatly respected in the circuit which he visited, and his religion was of that mild and subdued character, which excited no enmity, and perhaps was but imperfectly known. A Catholic, if very earnest in his faith, must lament the profession of the stage as a sin with difficulty to be expiated. His wife was a Protestant; and I have heard that the usual arrangement took place as to the children:—the girls followed the opinions of their mother, and their father's hopes for his daughters might charitably enlarge the Paradise of the Holy See.

Mrs. Kemble was the daughter of Mr. John Ward, an actor of merit, and the manager of a company of comedians acting in Warwickshire, and some of the adjacent counties. This gentleman, in the year 1746, seeing that the monument of Shakespeare, in the church of Stratford-upon-Avon, by the silent operation of one hundred and twenty years, had suffered considerably, took upon himself to make love of pleasure do the work of gratitude. The effigy of their great poet might have mouldered from the church walls before a corporation of his countrymen either invented or supplied the means of its restoration. The player conceived the design of a benefit performance in the old town-hall, on Tuesday, the 9th day of September 1746, and the black countenance of Othello restored the almost 'natural ruby' to the poet's own. Mr. Ward gave the whole produce of the receipts on this occasion; and the original colours being still ascertainable in 1748, the monument was carefully repaired, and Mr. John Hall, an artist, probably a descendant of the family of Shakespeare's son-in-law, exhibited the bard in his habit, as he lived, with all the sparkling pleasantry, which the original sculptor intended to perpetuate.

Mr. Ward spoke for the benefit, as we may call it, of

Shakespeare, some verses written by the Rev. Joseph Greene. The most learned education may fail to bestow more than the grammar of poetry; from Mr. Greene's forty-five lines, no couplet can be quoted but the first, and that only to shew how well he remembered, and must have imagined others to forget, the opening of Pope's prologue to Cato.

Mr. Greene thus begins his address:—

> 'To rouse the languid breast by strokes of art,
> When listless indolence had numb'd the heart.'

Mr. Pope's initial couplet runs thus:—

> 'To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,
> To raise the genius and to mend the heart.'

'To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,' becomes, in Mr. Greene's version, 'In Virtue's cause her drooping sons t'ingage'; and 'For this the tragic muse first trod the stage,' more architecturally, he tells us—

> 'For this first Attic theatres were raised.'

Charity, on many occasions, 'covers a multitude of sins,' and on this shall be allowed to hide all.

Mrs. Siddons, I have always understood to be senior to her brother, Mr. Kemble, by two years. She was born at Brecknock in South Wales, in the year 1755, and was named after her mother, Sarah. From her she derived that exact and deliberate articulation, the ground of all just speaking. In her youthful acquirements she had probably few aids beyond those of her parents, and could have none superior, as far as education conducted to professional excellence. In music she attained a degree of vocal perfection seldom heard among those comedians who travel; and as early as in her thirteenth year sustained the heroines of our English operas, and sang any incidental music that either the play itself or the copious attraction of the playbill in those days demanded.

It might be supposed that youthful families—in most conditions of life a helpless burthen—are more than usually irk-

some to the wandering professors of the stage; and indeed, in infancy, they must be so; but time abates much of this evil, and, by bringing the children within the range of employment, compensates in some degree the expense and the difficulty consequent upon their birth. We have all enjoyed a laugh at the cast of a play in the Daggerwood family; but the recurrence of the manager's name must be often found in the country play-bills of former times. A man of good character, with an amiable wife, and many children, spoke strongly to the feelings of the gentry in our opulent districts. The mixed appeal of vanity and poverty has been seldom better displayed than in the following invitation to a performance of *Theodosius*:—

'At the old theatre in East Grinstead, on Saturday, May 1758, will be represented (by particular desire, and for the benefit of Mrs. P.) the deep and affecting tragedy of *Theodosius, or the Force of Love*, with magnificent scenes, dresses, etc.

'Veranes by Mr. P., who will strive, as far as possible, to support the character of this fiery Persian Prince, in which he was so much admired and applauded at Hastings, Arundel, Petworth, Midworth, Lewes, etc.

'Theodosius by a young gentleman from the University of Oxford, who never appeared on any stage.[1]

'Athenais by Mrs. P. Though her present condition will not permit her to wait on gentlemen and ladies out of the town with tickets, she hopes, as on former occasions, for their liberality and support.

'Nothing in Italy can exceed the altar in the first scene of the play. Nevertheless, should any of the nobility or gentry wish to see it ornamented with flowers, the bearer will bring away as many as they chuse to favour him with.

'As the coronation of Athenais, to be introduced in the fifth act, contains a number of personages more than sufficient to fill all the dressing rooms, etc., it is hoped no

[1] But five years before, Smith, the accomplished, gentlemanly Smith, from the same seat of learning, smitten with the *mania* that is incurable, had acted this very character, under circumstances probably neither less ludicrous nor more respectable.

gentlemen and ladies will be offended at being refused admission behind the scenes.

'N.B. The great yard-dog, that made so much noise on Thursday night, during the last act of *King Richard the Third*, will be sent to a neighbour's over the way; and on account of the prodigious demand for places, part of the stable will be laid into the boxes on one side, and the granary open for the same purpose on the other.

'*Vivat Rex.*'

Alas! and human hearts have beat high with hope from temptations such as this; and a mother has thus uneasily struggled to obtain future comfort for the ripened fruit of her womb! The smile on such occasions hurries to the eye; but finds that tender observer of life already admonished and in tears.

But such, or similar artifices, must be constantly used to awaken the curiosity and secure the support of uncultivated audiences; and the long, circumstantial, and often ludicrous title-pages of the first published plays of Shakespeare seem to have served as models to the play-bills of succeeding times.

I have noticed in a kindred work the performance of the Princess Elizabeth, in Havard's *Charles the First*, by Miss Kemble. Whoever has studied the three views of the Monarch's countenance on one canvas, by Vandyke, so finely engraved by Sharp, can hardly fail to have observed the likeness, which certainly exists, between the features of the King and those of the Kemble family. The performance of Havard's play by them must therefore have had a verisimilitude, which, perhaps, no other performers could possibly bestow upon it. At this time, it will be remembered that our heroine was extremely beautiful, and an object of very general admiration for the intelligence of her look and the graceful modesty of her deportment.

The frequenters of the theatre are commonly charged with accepting the writers of the drama as authorities for English history. If they looked even further than the page of the poet their curiosity might still remain ungratified by the succinct and popular historians of the day.

The great Lord Clarendon supplies an adequate record as to the younger children of the unhappy Charles, and extends his liberality even to the conduct of his murderer. After the death of their father, they were 'ordered into the country, that they might not be the objects of respect to draw the eyes and application of people towards them. The allowance was retrenched, that their attendants and servants might be lessened; and order was given that they should be treated without any addition of titles, and that they should sit at their meat as the children of the family did, and all at one table.'

They were accordingly removed to the celebrated Penshurst, Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia, and placed under the control of the Countess of Leicester. There for a little time they were happy, in the careful tuition of a Mr. Lovel, who had the charge of the young Earl of Sunderland, whose mother was a daughter of the house of Leicester. Penshurst and its history must have been everything that was soothing to their minds. They were not permitted the protection of its sacred walls for any long time—but taken from the at least gentle custody of the Countess, and sent to the Castle of Carisbrook, to walk in the melancholy footsteps of their father.

A Captain Mildmay commanded in that fortress, and had an allowance for their maintenance—but it was strictly enjoined him, 'that he should permit no person to kiss their hands, and that they should in all respects be treated only as the children of a gentleman.' The tutor Lovel was sent thither to attend the Duke of Gloucester by his new style of Master Harry. At Carisbrook they remained, says Clarendon, two or three years. 'The Princess died in this place; and, according to the charity of that time towards Cromwell, very many would have it believed to be by poison; of which there was no appearance nor any proof ever after made.'

Her brother the Duke was permitted by Cromwell to embark from the Isle of Wight for Holland about the latter end of the year 1652, where he arrived in safety with his tutor Lovel, who had received a treasury warrant for five hundred pounds, to cover the expenses of hiring a

vessel and conveying him thither. His mother, Henrietta, had not seen the young Prince since he was a twelvemonth old, till she soon after embraced him at Paris. I have been tempted to this detail by some recent publications relative to the treatment of the children of Louis XVI., that, in the contrasted records of periods of guilt and horror and persecution, they may still exhibit the moral superiority of our countrymen.

This generous or calculating spirit of Cromwell, whichever it might be, is here exhibited; but I cannot withhold from the royalist the satisfaction of a portrait of that usurper, drawn by the masterly hand of Bossuet, who had himself intimately known the Queen of Charles I., and from her probably derived much knowledge of those tumultuous times.

'Un homme s'est rencontré d'une profondeur d'esprit incroyable, hypocrite raffiné autant qu'habile politique, capable de tout entreprendre et de tout cacher, également actif et infatigable dans la paix et dans la guerre, qui ne laissait rien à la fortune de ce qu'il pouvait lui ôter par conseil et par prévoyance, mais au reste si vigilant et si prêt à tout, qu'il n'a jamais manqué les occasions qu'elle lui a présentées; enfin un de ces esprits remuants et audacieux qui semblent être nés pour changer le monde.'

'A man arose of an incredible depth of mind; as refined a hypocrite as he was a dexterous politician; capable of undertaking all and concealing all; equally active and indefatigable in peace and war; one who left nothing to fortune that he could secure by deliberation and foresight,—but, nevertheless, so vigilant and ready, whatever chanced, that he never failed to seize all that occasion presented to him; in a word, one of those stirring and audacious spirits who seem born to alter the condition of the world.'

We will now return to the youthful actress, whose performance of the young princess led us to the history of times once received as a precedent in a neighbouring state, and likely to be a lesson of good or evil to mankind for ever.

It is reported by an old and respected friend of the family, that in her fifteenth year Miss Kemble excited an affection which at a different, though not a very distant, period led to her union with Mr. Siddons. He was, when I knew

him first, in the prime of life, a fair and very handsome man, sedate and graceful in his manners; and in his youth was capable of inspiring a passion quite as ardent as his own.

Mr. Siddons, as an actor, was valuable chiefly from his versatility,—he could do anything from Hamlet to harlequin. The parents of Miss Kemble probably expected that their daughter would look beyond the precarious profession of the stage; and, at all events, thought the age of fifteen too early a period to fix a destiny that must be irrevocable. As, however, the youthful lovers were deeply and sincerely engaged to each other, the parents tried the effect of a temporary separation, and for, I think, two years Miss Kemble resided under the protection of Mrs. Greatheed, equally removed from her lover and the stage.

In this retirement she probably regretted the loss of her profession something for itself, more as it seemed identified with her lover. A degree of impatience manifested itself in an application to Mr. Garrick. She privately informed him who she was, and solicited first his judgment, and secondly, his protection. The reader is to be informed that in all the charms of her youth Miss Kemble repeated some of the speeches of Jane Shore before him—he knows too by what an eye the music of her speech was heralded—Mr. Garrick seemed highly pleased with her utterance and her deportment; wondered how she had got rid of the old song, the provincial ti-tum-ti; told her how his engagements stood with the established heroines Yates and Younge, admitted her merits, regretted that he could do nothing for her—and wished her—a good morning.

But that I suppose these initiatory mortifications to be a branch of the profession, I should dissuade the youthful candidate for dramatic honours from an experiment productive of nothing but disappointment. I would not question the knowledge of the art in those who ably profess it; but the only unfailing approach to a London manager is a high provincial reputation, aided here by a death in his company, which leaves a chasm, or a dispute with a performer so important as to require a check. The expressions used at these interviews appear to be a prescriptive formulary, suited equally to Garrick or Rich, Colman or Harris; and the

CHAPTER II

MR. SIDDONS at this time sustained the first line of business in the company under the management of Mr. Kemble. He had not only that universality which in provincial theatres is the first of requisites, but I learn from a most intelligent contemporary, who knew him well, that he possessed the second, a quick study in almost uncqualled perfection. My friend informs me, that Mr. Siddons could make himself master of the longest dramatic character between night and night, and deliver the language with the accuracy that seems to result only from long application; but so slight, however perfect, was the impression, that it escaped entirely from his memory in as few hours as he had employed in its acquisition.

Without offence to Mr. Siddons, though probably not without pain, Mr. Kemble could unquestionably withdraw his daughter from a profession of which he knew the difficulties, and place her under the protection of a lady, with whom he might suppose brighter prospects would open before his child. However, the young lovers during their absence maintained a correspondence that kept up the ardour of their affection, and Mr. Siddons was probably acquainted with the step which led Miss Kemble to exhibit something of her talent before Mr. Garrick. The complimentary indifference with which he had frustrated her hopes (and sanguine indeed are the hopes of youth) confirmed the resolution it might have been expected to dispel: Miss Kemble decided upon two points; that she would be an actress, and that she would marry Mr. Siddons, and a journey to Scotland was probably averted by the consent of her parents to their

union. Her mother had found happiness not often exceeded in an union of exactly the same kind, and she no doubt overcame the lingering objections of her husband. Mr. Kemble himself gave his daughter's hand to Mr. Siddons before she had completed the eighteenth year of her age.

No doubt, in the language of our romances, 'he was the happiest of men.' The last chapters of those graceful inventions often severely tax the imaginations of the weary author to supply suitable loveliness to the fancied bride. But it may be received without the smallest scruple, that the Narcissas and Sophias of Smollett and Fielding did not exceed, in any perfection of their lovely sex, the mental and personal graces of Mrs. Siddons.

The young couple had now, however, an establishment to form and to support. With the ascertained existence of great talents in the actress, a veteran critic will record with an indulgent smile the attempt to surprise the caution of Garrick, and secure a town engagement at the outset of a professional career. It was the indiscretion of youth, little aware that, if it could have been obtained, it really ought not then to have been desired. But accident conspired with inclination to precipitate the appearance of Mrs. Siddons in London.

Cheltenham at that time was the resort of fashionable life, but of fashionable life only. The brise of gadding from the capital had not then stung every rank, and made the most moderate fortunes struggle at a watering-place for the appearance of at least pecuniary importance. During Mrs. Siddons' first season at Cheltenham, the springs were, fortunately for her, attended by Lord Bruce, soon after created Earl of Aylesbury, and his accomplished family. His lady was the daughter of Henry Hoare, Esq. of Stourhead, and taste and elegance may be said to have nursed her from her infancy. To be noticed by such patrons was a great advance indeed towards celebrity; and they did not merely content themselves with publicly attending Mrs. Siddons, they honoured her husband and herself with frequent calls at their lodgings, and openly displayed their admiration and esteem. With a kindred feeling, Lord Bruce too thought of Garrick and the capital; and he spoke his opinion so emphatically to the manager, that a more than complimentary

attention was thought now due to the actress; and the late Sir Henry Bate Dudley, then the Rev. H. Bate, was requested to attend her performances, and report upon her merits to the awakened patentee.

Managers of theatres have usually at their levees some favoured supporters of the daily press. The satirist is apt to look upon such a commerce with infinite disdain, and the literary *aides-de-camp* of Garrick could not escape the *Retaliation* of Goldsmith:—

> 'Ye Kenricks, ye Kellys, and Woodfalls so grave,
> What a commerce was yours, while you got and you gave!
> How did Grub Street re-echo the shouts that you rais'd,
> While he was be-Roscius'd, and you were be-prais'd.'

To the office of Kenrick the reverend critic above-named might properly succeed; but, had Goldsmith lived to assign him such a place, the Doctor himself might have suffered from 'retaliation.' Bate went upon his mission with Lord Bruce's praises as heralds to his admiration: he saw Mrs. Siddons in various characters, but was most struck with her Rosalind. At eighteen, she probably was more like the boy Ganymede than she could subsequently be; and the delicacy of the dependent Princess we may be sure was perfectly sustained by a kindred age, a graceful manner, and the most eloquent intelligence of countenance.

There is every reason to believe that Bate sincerely admired the young actress; and he might think that the best way of serving her with Garrick was to place her entirely at his mercy. Her husband and she were young enough, unsecured by any article, with neither specific salary, choice of parts, or permanent engagement, to condition only for a town appearance, and trust her fame and her interest to the mercy of rivals in possession of the public favour, and to the generosity of Mr. Garrick.

One like myself, so intimately acquainted with the peculiarity as speakers of the whole family of Kemble, will probably err but little in assigning the sort of excellence possessed by Mrs. Siddons on her first appearance. No doubt all those fiery markings of her intellect, those divine sparks that illumined her maturer age, slept unawaked under an exterior of modest beauty, from which such signs of

confidence were banished alike by timidity and prudence. In the choice of Portia too, if she had intended only to show how nearly Shakespeare had delineated her own character, more perfect identity could not well be found. She had her taste, her sensibility, her reflecting dignity, her unexpected powers of almost masculine declamation. But in Portia there was nothing to alarm, to excite, to fire with indignation, or subdue by tenderness; and for the other qualities, they are seldom felt by an audience, unless previously known, and existing in an established favourite. Mere declamation, however grand or just, never did more than convince the reason; what was here required was to raise an interest by piercing the heart. Had she appeared as Juliet, our ladies might have wept at the sorrows of a Capulet and thought of themselves. At Portia their feelings could be little moved, except such as were excited by human goodness, and ended in almost religious veneration. A sober lesson of oratory kindles no enthusiasm, acquires no popularity. The stage has no medium in its purposes, you must divert or distress.

That excellent prose writer and amiable man, Cowley, seems to have thought that very favourable circumstances were essential to the production of anything which should convey delight to others. 'There is nothing,' says he, 'that requires so much serenity and cheerfulness of spirit; it must not be overwhelmed with the cares of life, or overcast with the clouds of melancholy and sorrow, or shaken and disturbed with the storms of injurious fortune; it must, like the halcyon, have fair weather to breed in. The soul must be filled with bright and delightful ideas, when it undertakes to communicate delight to others.'

There is, however, in the temperament of many minds a power to throw aside the pressure of personal evils, and to call some sweet illusion to the aid, begotten by the fancy, and ending too often in delusion as it began. Such is indeed the professional soul of acting. Whatever be the encumbrances of fortune, and the weight of sorrow, often too of sickness, the assumed part must be supported on the stage, and the overborne feelings of the performer find their indulgence or relief upon the pillow.

It is easy for me to conceive the strong sense entertained at first by Mr. Siddons of the talents of his wife; but, not to judge entirely by the event, I must, from the existing circumstances, consider the time of her coming to town badly chosen. At Garrick's Theatre, there were Miss Younge and Mrs. Yates, often disputing, but constantly occupying, all that was worth doing in tragedy and sober comedy. Mrs. Abington carried the sparkling gaiety or pungent satire of the lighter muse higher than the moderns can conceive. Whom was the new actress to displace, or was she to await a lingering succession, with sometimes the chance, like pretty Mrs. Davies, or the wife of Tom King, of doubling the imperious majesties of Younge, Yates, or Abington? This, to be sure, was the last season of Garrick, and therefore the stage was likely to want attraction on his retirement; but it should have come from the other sex—to bring forward Mrs. Siddons, and allow her no business of importance, was without a hope of attraction to the theatre, and a cruel injury to her fame. She submitted, however, to her ill chance, and I am to preserve a particular account of the first season in London of the greatest actress whom the world perhaps ever saw. It had no advantage but one, namely, that she had a close opportunity of studying the tragic excellence that she was, seven years after, to rival or surpass: besides the two heroines of her own theatre, and the closing performances of Mr. Garrick, Barry and his wife were acting this season at the other house, and she had many opportunities of appreciating merits all of the highest rank, however differing from each other. She retained nothing whatever that reminded you of those who had preceded her.

It was on Friday, the 29th of December 1775, that this great woman made her first appearance on the London boards in the character of Portia; she was announced as 'a young lady' merely; and the arts of instilling favour into the town, if they were then known, were not in her case practised: the play-bills were only inserted in two journals of that day, the *Public Advertiser* and the *Gazetteer*; and the theatrical notices were confined to a very coolly coloured paragraph, dated from each theatre, and announcing, with

modest penury of phrase, a performance to have been received either with great or very great applause. Taking all the even modern advantages of underlining at the foot of a bill inviting the town to see an unknown young lady in Portia on the Friday, they were told that Saturday would, at all events, be sure of its delight; for, in *The Mourning Bride* of Congreve, Miss Younge was to appear in Zara, and Mrs. Yates in Almeria!

Old Sheridan acted Hamlet, which might not do her much harm, at the other house; but King in Shylock at Drury Lane could only remind the judicious of what was wanting. As an actor, that gentleman had nerve, vigour, point, and precision; but take away passion from Shylock, and he is 'poor indeed': that very word itself, as spoken by Henderson, was a volume of impression—

> 'Hath not a Jew eyes;—
> Organs, dimensions, senses, affections,—PASSIONS?'

King spoke the Jew as he spoke Touchstone in the degrees of the lie, or Puff in the mystery of puffing, which the reader, of our times at least, knows to be the same thing. Bassanio was supported by the nasal solemnity of Bensley, a singular lover for a young lady not of age. Reddish acted Antonio, and Vernon, the Viganoni of English opera, sang to the gentle Jessica; that lovely Hebrew was represented by a Miss Jarrett, and the pretty Mrs. Davies before mentioned, as Clerk, attended our female barrister into court.

The afterpiece on this occasion was *The Jubilee*, that season revived with much vogue. Mrs. Siddons was received with great applause, and repeated the character of Portia on the Tuesday following. The second night was weakness reduced to absolute certainty; as if the strength of Saturday had not been sufficient, Monday presented the Lady Macbeth of Mrs. Yates, which was by many degrees the best, until the maturity of her unthought-of follower appropriated the royal murderess to herself.

Mrs. Siddons then waited till the 13th of January for one of the Ladies Collegiate in Ben Jonson's *Epicœne*, which had been restored to the stage by Colman. That not more excellent wit than critic, on this occasion, fairly

told the town, that 'he considered it as one of the principal duties of a director of a theatre to atone in some measure for the mummery which his situation obliges him to exhibit, by bringing forward the productions of our most esteemed writers.' Garrick assisted him in his object, for he had constantly managed upon the system of revivals. In the following year Mr. Colman collected and published his dramatic productions; but, in 1777, he had no ambition to record that Mrs. Siddons ever acted in *The Silent Woman*, and her name is omitted among the performers, though he professes to give the cast in 1776. The three lady graces in his book are Miss Sherry, Mrs. Davies, and Miss Platt.

The reader has seen that Bate's report of our actress decided the great manager to receive her; though, as to his heroines, he was precisely in the same situation as he was when he recently refused her. Probably her gratitude, certainly not her fame, led her to accept a part of trifling moment, in an opera by Bate, called *The Blackamoor Washed White*. In the bills of the day, her Virgilian name stood undistinguished in the crowd, in the same secondary type with that of Mrs. Bradshaw, and the stately conjunction, so ambitiously coveted on such occasions, was thus attended—

AND

MRS. WRIGHTEN

But this great negro experiment was reserved for other times, and I hope a clergy less lay in their manners than the author. The piece received some alterations on its second performance, in vain; on its third it was preceded by Garrick's *Lusignan*; but, as the audience came to see that great actor, very few indeed cared for further entertainment, and the afterpiece also that night retired from the house.

At length, on the 15th of February, Mrs. Siddons, still unpromoted, marched in Mrs. Cowley's comedy of *The Runaway*, which a very dexterous application of Mr. and Mrs. Garrick, combined with much sprightly talent of the author, carried on for seventeen nights, I think, during its first season; and in doing so gave our charming woman so

many opportunities of at least showing her person on the stage. But Miss Younge here was the magnet, and indeed nearly all that could be wished.

Mrs. Siddons was 'to sound the very base string of humility,' by actually performing in a farce of Vaughan's, called *Love's Metamorphoses*. Being the busy friend of Murphy, he contrived not to be overlooked by the satirist Churchill, and is thus preserved under the name of Dapper in *The Rosciad*. As a writer, Vaughan had very slender power; but he long continued, like Master Mathew, to detail in society his various 'toys of the Muses'; and could, at all events, tell many agreeable stories of the wits and geniuses who had countenanced his youth. He had been also clerk of the peace for Westminster, and, fortunately for conversation, had less law about him than poetry.

In the beginning of my literary career I found myself in the society of this gentleman, and thought him supremely happy in the graceful accomplishments of his daughter. She too wrote verses in the daily prints, and assumed the signature of Cesario; I suppose from some fanciful reference to the character of Viola, then rendered beyond measure enchanting in the melodious tones of Mrs. Jordan. But the *Metamorphoses* of Vaughan had none of the Ovidian perpetuity about them; and Mrs. Siddons was released at once from transformations that were anything but poetical.

Let not our readers be impatient to see the object of their admiration so long dishonoured. Some little gratification attached even to her first season in town. Mr. Garrick did not seem unwilling to employ her; but he either did not desire her qualifications to move in a higher sphere, or that region was too exclusively occupied to allow of her invasion. She had, at all events, the means of closely studying the great master of the art, and he at length trusted her in a scene of some importance to himself, by casting her into Mrs. Strictland, in Hoadley's admirable *Suspicious Husband*, when he was to leave the parting impression of his excellence, in the character of Ranger.

As far as the talents of Mrs. Siddons ever tended to comedy, nothing could suit her better than to represent this

young, lovely, and timid wife—the choice showed very exact judgment in the manager. The three epithets equally indicated the actress. When, going to her station in the bed-chamber, she heard the smart and pointed manner of Garrick, and from the wing saw him ascend the ladder, no doubt she felt some alarm—how she should conduct herself in the scene with him, which was immediately to follow; and hoped, probably prayed, that she might not diminish his usual brilliant effect. No doubt it was the recollection of his vivacity that made her exclaim to a friend of mine, after seeing a modern Ranger, whose pleasantry is of a more sober cast (sober is not the right word, solemn may be rather better); 'Up—I—go?' bless me! is that the tone of comedy in the 'modern school?' The popularity of the performance must be the only answer to the question.

As it has been doubted whether Mr. Garrick was really friendly to Mrs. Siddons, it should be remembered here that *The Suspicious Husband* had then not been acted for two years; that he might, in casting the play, have passed her over, if he had not intended to serve her; and his favourable if not very high opinion may be presumed from the bringing her into close contact with himself. It was just upon the close of his career, on the 23rd of May 1776, that he revived the play. The performance was repeated. On this occasion, her type was enlarged in the bill. She occupied a whole line herself, thus:—

Mrs. Strictland, ... MRS. SIDDONS.

The mention of this play reminds me of a critical debt to the memory of the ingenious author. It is known, I hope to but few persons, that, with the usual authoritative and slashing decision of youth, I once ventured to write criticisms upon the masters of dramatic composition. I am ashamed of the style in which I dared to speak of this comedy—but the avowal, and the atonement, shall at least last as long as I am at all remembered. A few hours only have passed away since I attentively perused this play, and I read it with delight, only interrupted by a burning blush at my injustice. No; *The Suspicious Husband* has none of the wit of Congreve, but it has all his vivacity, and makes

nearer approaches to the language of life. That happiest of our wits had little structure, and what he has seems always forced. The structure of *The Suspicious Husband* is admirable, and the incidents in the highest degree probable; those of *The Wonder*, by Mrs. Centlivre, are not happier in their contrivances to excite or appease the jealousy of Don Felix than Hoadley has supplied to occupy the sullen and constitutional distress of Mr. Strictland. There is a unity too in this play that should be pointed out—every interest converges towards Strictland. The gaiety of Clarinda contributes to his jealousy—the elopement of Jacintha excites the same feeling—the pursuit of Frankly, the perseverance of Bellamy, the vinous flights of Ranger, all excite or confirm him in his folly.

In points of contrivance, what can be better than Lucetta's interference to save her mistress's honour, when the hat of Ranger is discovered by her master in his lady's apartment? First snatching away the hat really worn in her boy's dress by Jacintha, and then prompting her with 'Is not the hat yours? own it, Madam!' Seconded too so admirably by the *nonchalance* of the young runaway:—

'Dear Mrs. Strictland, be not concerned. When he has diverted himself a little longer with it, I suppose he will give me my hat again.'[1]

Very easy, and natural too, is Strictland's tearing open the letter of Frankly to Clarinda, and dropping the envelope before he reads it. When that is brought to his notice, what can be finer than its not carrying conviction to the jealous mind, and his exclamation alone, 'They must be poor indeed at the work, if they will not lend one another their names.'

It has occurred to other critics that Strictland resembles Kitely; and indeed few authors have left such palpable instances of their admiration of their predecessors as Dr. Hoadley exhibits in the present play. The student of Ben Jonson will have preserved a dear recollection of the scene

[1] I should not be surprised if this were in Mrs. Cholmondeley's recollection, wher, upon Johnson's seizing her hand, and admiring its delicate whiteness and beautiful form, she exclaimed, 'I wonder whether he will give it me again, when he has done with it?'

in *Every Man in his Humour*, where Kitely deliberates whom he should entrust with the secret of his suspicions, and employ as a spy upon his wife. This scene, the second of the third act, is feebly but distinctly echoed by Hoadley in the third scene of his own second. The same incident of beginning an impartment to Cash, and suddenly thinking Cob a preferable person; then dismissing the amendment, and recurring to the original motion, is identical in the latter work. Strictland commences with Lucetta, then resorts to Tester as the fitter object, rejects Tester, and returns to Lucetta. The modern follows his master, even to the language of his exit.

'*Strict.* There is no hell on earth like being a slave to suspicion,'

is a prose translation of the second line of Jonson's final couplet—

'*Kite.* No greater hell than to be slave to fear.'

The invention of the incidents and their rapid succession, their admirable fitness for the stage, and the power of exhibiting the talents of the actor, all here seem to imply a long exercise of dramatic composition, and a mind devoted to the object. The business is so perfectly native to the stage that one might fancy it suggested by such a man as Mr. Garrick. The coincidence was striking too that exhibited *The Suspicious Husband*, and Dr. Johnson's prologue, and the improved state of Drury Lane Theatre, in the same year, 1747.

Hitherto it will be remarked that nothing had been done for Mrs. Siddons in tragedy. Bate had chiefly admired her Rosalind, and in town she had been allowed to touch nothing but comedy. But she was, even under Garrick, just permitted

'To peep at what she would—
Act little of her will.'

The great actor had determined to revive *Richard the Third*, which he had discontinued for five years, and he assigned the part of Lady Anne to Mrs. Siddons. She there met Roscius in all his terrors, and on the first night hung a little back from timidity. I have mentioned, in

another work, the glance of reproach that corrected the failure, and the extreme sensibility with which it was long retained. But she had an opportunity to retrieve her credit with him, when they repeated the characters on the 3rd of June; and she had the honour to support him on his third appearance in Richard, which was by command of their Majesties, on the 5th of June. But, whatever he thought of her, and whatever might be his intentions, he closed his own brilliant career five days afterwards, in the character of Don Felix, and left her to a dismissal, which had perhaps been arranged some time before. Some little honour had been paid to her in the bills of both these plays; her name looked something in them; and the style of announcing her first appearance, in Mrs. Strictland and Lady Anne, augured more present estimation than was retained by the new management. How her noble patrons were appeased on the occasion I know not. The actress felt herself to be deeply injured, and retired from a scene that presented little but mortification.

When Mr. Garrick resumed his performances after the Christmas holidays, he announced his characters for the last time; and drew very fashionable audiences to his Abel Drugger, Sir Ant. Brainville, his Hamlet (which he acted with his alterations), his Ranger, and his King Lear. The fund for the benefit of the decayed actors was this last season doubly indebted to him; he performed Hamlet for them on the 30th of May, and Don Felix on the 10th of the month following, his last appearance on the stage.

It has by many been supposed that Mr. Garrick was ungenerous and insincere with respect to Mrs. Siddons; that he saw her vast talent, and from a mean jealousy threw it into shade. But it may be fair to inquire what proofs he had received of the possession then of that genius, which, six years after, it was impossible to dispute? He had seen her in comedy; had we only seen her in comedy, who among us would have presumed her tragic excellence, or even discerned the beauties, which our love has since detected, in certain characters in the train of Thalia? He placed her by his side in Richard; she herself acknowledges alarm and confusion. How was he to anticipate in the

trembling Lady Anne, the future Katharine and Constance and Lady Macbeth, before whom the long line of theatric queens were all to fade away, and leave to her alone the glory of being in fame associated with himself? 'But he might be jealous of Mrs. Siddons!' Ay, to be sure; at most, however, as he might be of that which he had formed and cherished—the talent of Mrs. Yates, and Miss Younge, and Mrs. Abington at his own theatre, and of Mrs. Barry at the other. But does anybody, even now, believe that Mrs. Siddons, at twenty, was equal to these actresses, or near them in excellence? If it was her future power that alarmed him, how could his present conduct destroy its efficacy? This was his last season; if then she did not touch him, as to his own impression, she was nothing. She had been born an actress, bred an actress, and married an actor;—her relatives for generations had followed the profession; there was no chance, therefore, of driving a hearted love of it from the stage.

There is one more conjecture formed, which imputes caprice, as a slight addition to injustice: 'Mr. Garrick loved to discover for himself; and did not like to have "greatness thrust" upon his notice by others.' Our self-love has rendered this feeling common to our nature; and to pursue such a course of criticism is, in fact, to censure Garrick for not being superior to humanity. But fame loves a lofty mark, and the pinion must be strong to support even an eagle flight to her temple. It was a real service to Mrs. Siddons to arouse her reflection by impediment, and increase the force by distant campaigns, that was at length to dispose in triumph of the Capitol itself. Let it be remembered too, that she declaimed only in Portia; and that Mr. Garrick himself excelled in the wild and fiery breaks of passion. We always most love a merit congenial with our own: now we have the authority of Dr. Johnson himself that the declamation of Garrick was not excellent. The commencement of this young and interesting lady was thwarted by many difficulties; she had none of the welcome with which the Poet of Nature has adorned the advent of Beauty. She but walked in the character of Venus.

'Te Dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila coeli,
Adventumque tuum; tibi suaveis daedala tellus
Summittit flores; tibi rident aequora ponti,
Placatumque nitet diffuso lumine coelum.'

Creech, though an editor of Lucretius, lost all the charm of these lines in his translation; the mellifluous Dryden has preserved it beyond all praise.

'Thee, goddess, thee, the clouds and tempests fear,
And at thy pleasing presence disappear:
For thee the land in fragrant flowers is drest;
For thee the ocean smiles, and smooths her wavy breast;
And Heaven itself with more serene and purer light is blest.'

In the year 1782 the above did not exceed the triumphant gratulation which she experienced.

Having thus attended Mrs. Siddons through her first season in London, it may be proper to review the stage itself, during one rendered important by many concurring events, besides that most important one that could ever happen—the retirement of Mr. Garrick himself.

The manager did, not in a literary sense, neglect his last season; he opened it by a prelude, called *The Theatrical Candidates*, written by himself: and so early as the 28th of October produced a musical farce for Miss Abrams, called *May Day; or, The Little Gipsy*, in which Weston made his last appearance on the stage. He died on the 12th of January 1776, at his lodgings in Newington, Surrey. This actor has always been placed at the head of his class; and had merely to show himself to accomplish the full task of the low comedian. It must have been by strong effort that Mr. Garrick kept down the speaking intelligence of his own eye, and that harmony of the whole features, which indicates the purity and polish of the mind, to express only the sordid cunning and gross ignorance of Abel Drugger. He had seen such a being in life, or conceived him from Jonson, and therefore could represent the veriest of dolts. Still it must have been evident

'By what compulsion and laborious flight
He sunk thus low.'

But Weston was the thing itself;—so that as, of later days, in the case of Emery, it might be almost questioned whether

it were acting at all; since the man excited precisely the same feeling in his profession and out of it. Our very admiration itself marks the distinction between the two exhibitions of nature and of art;—the first secures an unreflecting enjoyment; the second a wonder also, at the skill that could render imitation so exact.

On the 21st of November 1775, Mr. Sheridan, then only in the 23rd year of his age, produced, at Covent Garden Theatre, the comic opera of *The Duenna*. It ran sixty-five nights during its first season, and therefore claims the second place among English operas. But, what was really honourable to Sheridan, it obtained this high rank

'Without one bribe to luxury or vice.'

He had a very simple Spanish plot, on which his characters were to work: young ladies and their governantes—their lovers and parents. The secret of *The Beggar's Opera* was political, though hardly felt to be so. It seemed like the inquisition of justice into privileged atrocity, and took the usual vulgar liberty of a saturnalian abuse of authority. An inverse ratio of morals was displayed, and there is a melancholy avowal at last 'that even highwaymen cannot be true to one another!' The lower instruments of justice are shown in close connection with the robber, and whether to save or destroy him is an affair of simple calculation. Here are charms irresistible indeed to bad taste.

The Duenna is gay without indecorum—though it may be doubted whether, since the Reformation of Luther, any monasteries have displayed the festivities of Father Paul to the envy of any lay attendant. Sheridan follows Dryden in his humour, and happily follows him too in his lyrical effusions. But as to the stage, the power to resemble that great man ended where and when it began. Sheridan has one marked propriety in his songs—they are not mere vehicles for music; a sort of tender or whimsical *à propos*, with little or no relation to character or business;—they carry on always the dialogue or resolutions of the persons engaged; their meaning is essential to the display of the interest.

Sheridan never himself printed this opera, which I think was published by the authority of the proprietor of Covent Garden Theatre, in whom the copyright, I believe, was vested by the author's original bargain. This notion of keeping back the drama from the press is in its design impolitic, and always ineffectual. Copies must be allowed to the country theatres, and the production finds its way speedily to the Irish printer, who receives it perhaps full of errors, and, at best, strictly preserves them all. Publication never yet diminished the attraction of the stage. The number of books sold nightly in our theatres proves this decisively. To delay it is to gratify the first thirst of curiosity with an impure draught; and when the genuine fountain of the muse is permitted to play, it is unregarded by the many, and runs to waste, or into the reservoirs only of the collector.

On the day following the production of *The Duenna*, viz. the 22nd November, died Sir John Hill. The masterly character of him, by Churchill, was in fact his history :—

> 'With sleek appearance, and with ambling pace,
> And type of vacant head, with vacant face,
> The Proteus Hill put in his modest plea,
> "Let Favour speak for others, Worth for me."
> For who, like him, his various pow'rs could call
> Into so many shapes, and shine in all?
> Who could so nobly grace the motley list,
> Actor, Inspector, Doctor, Botanist?
> Knows any one so well—sure no one knows—
> At once to play, prescribe, compound, compose?'

Among the authors of these islands, Hill, as to quantity, stood alone, until the present day displayed at all events the works of the writer of the Scottish Novels. The author of *The Vegetable System*, in 26 volumes in folio, was at once frivolous and laborious. He dressed more gaily than any man about town—was the prominent feature at all public amusements—was the great critic and libellist of his day—engaged in endless controversies, and sometimes personal altercations; and yet, by a diligence for which he only could find the time, he was employed by the booksellers upon works which for the most part proceed from such beings as only visit the 'glimpses of the moon'—

men of extinguished ambition and sullen diligence—the re-writers of forgotten facts, and sometimes the unravellers of entangled science. Hill wrote in the Supplement to Chambers—a body of Natural History—and *The Vegetable System.* Essays and magazines were shaken as scattered leaves from his vast trunk. Botany was his first and fond pursuit—botany led him to stroll into the country from his shop in St. Martin's-lane—and strolling led him to think of acting as a resource; but it was not the dramatic stage to which the talents of Hill were suited—that of the mountebank claimed him as its Roscius, and blazoned his genius to distant ages as the father of quack simplicity. Who has not heard of the '*Essence of Water-Dock—The Tincture of Valerian—The Pectoral Balsam of Honey*—and *The Tincture of Bardana?*'

As Hill was often, in his quality of inspector, offensive to the stage, so he sometimes provoked the castigation of Garrick and his friends, and a stream of epigrams attested the doctor's severity, or his impertinence. In the way of address and reply, some of these had wit enough to gall a man of any sensibility.

'To take thy own physic and read thy own rhymes,'

was neatly answered by,

'If he takes his physic first,
He'll never read his rhymes.'

To the attack upon Mr. Garrick, for pronouncing the letter I as if it were an U, Roscius promised amendment, with too little consideration perhaps of the nature of ours and of other languages. All the attempts as to either E or I to be discriminated, before the letter R, from the vowel U, will foil the neatest speaker, and sound affected even when done. The reader may easily try his own dexterity in the words Bertram—Birnam—and Burney. The unequalled point in Garrick's epigram shall close the subject of Sir John Hill's honours:—

'May the right use of letters, as well as of men,
Hereafter be fix'd by the tongue and the pen:
Most devoutly I wish that they both have their due,
And that *I* may be never mistaken for *U.*'

I have already pointed to the great rival talents at Covent Garden Theatre, to show what I considered the impolicy of Mrs. Siddons's town appearance. Barry was acting even against the *chef-d'œuvre* of Garrick, and melodiously breathing

'The well-applauded tenderness of Lear.'

Perhaps there is an implied censure in this seeming panegyric by Churchill. The aged monarch has to be sure one scene of affecting imbecility:—the jarring senses, overborne by the fierce storm of insanity, faint into a deliquium, from which state only they can be again recovered to the truth of their functions.

But to characterise a Lear by his tenderness only is to assert the absence of what was vital to the character,—starts of ungovernable passion from one

'Who lov'd, not wisely, but too well.'

With his heart always flying to his own lips, nothing but the incessant profession of love for him satisfies him of its existence. To oppose his will, on any ground, is treason to his blood. He has no time for reflection. He throws off the darling among his daughters; banishes the hated trunk of obnoxious fidelity from his dominions; resigns, without the caution of Ulysses,[1] his ears to the sirens; is despised, ejected, exposed to the howling tempest, goes distracted; is for a time recovered under the care of that filial piety which he had injured, to break the last string of his aged heart over the corpse of that angelic child, who had perished in the effort to restore him to his throne.

It was such a view of the character that rendered Mr. Garrick's Lear so transcendent. In the opinion of the ablest critics, he in no other part so much surpassed the efforts of other men. To build only upon Lear's feebleness is to show that you cannot reach his force. But where can praise be found that will not sully the poetical creator of Lear? That this wonderful work of nature's favourite son should ever have been exposed to the horrible *rifacimento* of the Parisian stage, that he should have been studded with

[1] See the *Odyssey* of Homer, Lib. XII. l. 178.

little glittering points and closet antitheses, and sent forth in only the declining taste of Voltaire, moves alike our wonder and indignation.

After struggling in vain to translate the curse into French verse, Ducis arrives at the terrific close, where the unnatural mother is to feel the pang beyond the serpent's tooth, a thankless child—he then indulges the modern Athenians with

'C'en est fait, mon ami, j'ai cessé d'être pere'
My friend, 'tis done,—I am no more a father.

In the scene where Cordelia tries the effect of the great 'assay of art' upon her father, the reader remembers the questions which Nature and Shakespeare put into her mouth; let him take the following on the authority of M. Ducis:—

Cor. Do you remember you were a *King*?
Lear. No: but I remember I was a *Father.*

The critics of France predicted the immortality of this distinction: but Maty told them that, from the nature of Lear's malady, he could not recollect he was a father, without remembering that he was a dethroned one. I think I hear the happy *sang-froid* of the reply,—'Ah! ma foi! mais c'est sublime.'

Barry and his wife, this season, acted Jaques and Rosalind for the benefit of Woodward, who himself performed Touchstone. Lewis, the airy, the mercurial, who infused so large a portion of the *vis comica* into the last thirty years of the stage, was then acting Orlando, and hearing Mrs. Mattocks in Celia sing the 'Cuckoo song.'[1]

[1] The youth of Lewis, with all its sparkling captivations, was not undistinguished by the sex. Among his foreign admirers he had the honour to number the celebrated Gabrielli. On her arrival in this country, she paid a visit to Covent Garden Theatre, and was powerfully struck by the graces of Lewis. As an Italian singer is usually little disposed to refuse herself any attainable object of her wishes, she resolved to send off love's ambassador with the frank declaration of her passion, and a gracious command to Mercutio to visit her immediately. Rauzzini, however, changed the arrangement, by apprising the Gabrielli, that the *habits* of this country did not allow of such rapid movements, even in matters of the first taste. She reluctantly yielded to his experience, and thus, in the language of Burke, 'gave a domination (so repeatedly) vanquisher of *laws*, to be subdued by manners.' The great historian too here pleasingly reminds us of our German ancestors. *Plusque ibi boni mores valent, quam alibi bonæ leges.'—Tacit. de Mor. Germ.*

Though he, as a comedian, served under Woodward, Lewis copied nothing from him, but his Harlequin activity. Lee Lewes preserved more; for he imitated the stunted hoarseness of his voice, and would have been a perfect resemblance had he possessed the mind of his original. For Woodward had a good deal of talent of the sportive kind. A parody of his from *Cato*, on the opening of Covent Garden Theatre, in 1773, admits a few extracts to his honour.

'We learn from sure advice, that with bold haste
The ruffian winter—whom so late we chac'd
With mirth and song,—returns once more to wage
Invidious war, and musters all his rage.
How shall we treat this bold impetuous foe?
How foil his malice and divert the blow?
Already has our wisdom found it meet
To issue forth our high theatric writ,
And call you from your insecure retreats;
Your distant palaces, your country seats;
Your village lodgings, and your evening rambles.'

After counselling war, and enumerating the dramatic forces now taking the field, he, in the sovereign style, addresses the representatives of the nation:—

'Thus leagu'd and arm'd, it cannot sure surprise
Our loving people, if we ask supplies.
Our just expenses various are and great;
Our gods take subsidies—our dead must eat:
Our Ministers have strict commands to lay
The bills before you—that, from day to day,
Yourselves may judge the whole with critic eye,
And see the services your aids supply.'

From such a man a Bobadil might be expected, rich in humour, 'planet-struck'—something beyond the ignorant bluster that since has disgraced Jonson and the stage.

The lovers of comedy should mark the 19th of June with a stone of brilliant whiteness, for on that day Edwin made his first appearance at the Haymarket, in Foote's *Cozeners*. He succeeded Weston in Toby, and displayed all the graces of the Aircastle family. O, that inimitable tree of collateral relation, branching out into endless ramification, and losing himself in his own luxuriance! Hear him, and seek him out among your friends of all times.

'*Air*. Did not I tell you what Parson Prunello said?—I remem-

ber Mrs. Lightfoot was by—she had been brought to bed, that day was a month, of a very fine boy—a bad birth; for Dr. Seeton, who served his time with Luke Lancet of Guise's—there was also a talk about him and Nancy the daughter—she afterwards married Will Whitlow, another apprentice, who had great expectations from an old uncle in the Grenades; but he left all to a distant relation, Kit Cable, a midshipman aboard the *Torbay*—she was lost, coming home, in the channel—the captain was taken up by a coaster from Rye, loaded with cheese.

'*Mrs. Air.* Mercy upon me, Mr. Aircastle, at what a rate you run on! What has all this to do with our coming to London?

'*Air.* Why I was going to tell you—but you will never have patience.'

Surely this is really to revive the Quicklys and the Pompeys; or rather to read a page of nature with that piercing eye that our too exclusive admiration places only in the head of Shakespeare.

The original of this fine sketch, for Foote rarely finished anything, was an Irish gentleman of the name of Gahagan, as the author himself told my friend Henderson. Whether Gahagan was aware of the liberty which the wit took with his peculiarities, I cannot say—but, however that may be, when Foote died, his Aircastle wrote a character of him; and I presume the reader, in his love of retributive justice, will not be sorry to see it here. Allowing for the exaggeration of farce, it has positively a strong resemblance, in composition, to the rapid manner, and quick transition, and uncommon returns to his subject, with which the English Aristophanes displayed his airy friend.

Character of the late Mr. Foote.

'He was a very extraordinary man, and had talents which he abused. He abounded in wit, humour, and sense; but he was so fond of detraction and mimicry, that he might be properly called a buffoon; and they were a great blemish in his conversation, though he entertained you. He was generally civil to your face, and seldom put you out of humour with yourself; but you paid for his civility the moment you turned your back, and were sure of being made ridiculous. He was not so malignant as some I have

known, but his excessive vanity led him into satire and ridicule. He was vain of his classical knowledge (which was but superficial), and of his family, and used to boast of his numerous relations in the West of England. He was most extravagant and baubling, but not generous. He delighted in buying rings, snuff-boxes, and toys, which were a great expense to him; and he lost money at play, and was a dupe with all his parts. He loved wine and good living, and was a mighty pretender to skill in cookery, though he did not understand a table so well as he thought; he affected to like dishes and ragouts, and could not bear to eat plain beef or mutton, which showed he had a depraved appetite; he spared no expense in his dinners, and his wine was good. He was very disgusting in his manner of eating, and not clean in his person; but he was so pleasant, and had such a flow of spirits, that his faults and foibles were overlooked. He always took the lead in company, and was the chief or sole performer. He had such a rage for shining, and such an itch for applause, that he often brought to my mind Pope's lines on the Duke of Wharton:—[How, how, my dear Aircastle?]

> "Though senates hung on all he spoke,
> The mob must hail him master of the joke."

'He loved lords' company, though he gave himself airs of despising them, and treating them cavalierly. He was licentious and sensual,—made a jest of religion and morality, and of all worthy men. He told a story very pleasantly, and added many circumstances of his own invention to heighten it. He had a good choice of words and apt expressions, and could speak very well upon grave subjects; but he soon grew tired of serious conversation, and returned naturally to his favourite subject, mimicry, in which he did not excel; for he drew caricatures by which he made you laugh more than a closer mimic. He was a coarse actor, yet he played the parts in his own plays better than any who have appeared in them since his death; for instance, Major Sturgeon, Aircastle, Cadwallader, etc.

'He had a flat vulgar face, without expression; but where a part was strongly ridiculous he succeeded, for he always

ran into farce; so that I have been often surfeited with him on the stage, and never wished to see him twice in the same character. Though he wanted simplicity in acting, yet he was a very good judge of the stage; but so unfair and so disposed to criticise, that you could not depend upon his opinion.

'As a writer, he certainly had merit, and afforded great entertainment to the town for many years. If he had taken more pains in finishing his pieces, they would have been equal to most of our comedies; but he was too indolent and too idle to carry them to perfection.

'Upon the whole, his life and character would furnish a subject for a good farce, with an instructive moral. It would show that parts alone are of little use without prudence or virtue; and that flashes of wit and humour give only a momentary pleasure, but no solid entertainment.'

CHAPTER III

THE new managers, Sheridan, Linley, and Forde, had not deemed the talents of Mrs. Siddons essential to their plan. It is extremely probable that, as Colman sportively told their first audience, they did build much upon opera. Who, indeed, but Sheridan, after the amazing run of *The Duenna*, would have delayed a month in starting again upon the same course? He had Linley with him,—they could reciprocally suggest dramatic and musical hints:—but, against all calculation, as if he loved to disappoint every human expectation,—he never wrote a second opera.

Mr. Garrick had quitted the stage—but he did not expect to be speedily forgotten, and, indeed, laboured to adorn his retirement with the regret and the fondness of the public. He loved to read that Shakespeare and Jonson and Fletcher had retired with him, and that all which was natural had quitted the stage with his Don Felix. His kindred spirit, Colman, with the characteristic of Tydeus,

'Major in exiguo regnabat corpore virtus,'[1]

to pay the compliments of the new management, and meet the expectation of the old, had infused his very soul into a prelude, called *New Brooms*. Of all the specimens left by himself or others of this agreeable entertainment, perhaps this is unquestionably the best. I shall amuse myself, and I hope no few of my readers, by a notice of its whimsical and pointed style.

Roscius is represented by Catcall as bringing houses full as an egg; but he adds—'He is gone off with the meat, and a whole crew of new managers are putting to sea in the

[1] Statius, *Theb.* Lib. I. l. 417.

egg-shell.' Phelim, an Irishman, by the national representative Moody, blundered out no unacceptable praise.—'The little man was so grate himself, there was no room for anybody else.' The same learned person, to show little Roscius the difference, stumbles upon another compliment to him in *Richard II.*:—

> 'As in a theatre the eyes of men,
> After a well-grac'd actor leaves the stage,
> Are idly bent on him that enters next.'

Upon the expected reign of opera, we have some very pleasant sarcasm from Crotchet—the dialogue is, it seems, 'refreshed by an air every instant. Two gentlemen meet in the park, for example, admire the place and the weather, and after a speech or two, the orchestra take their cue, the music strikes up, one of the characters takes a genteel turn or two on the stage during the symphony, and then breaks out—"When the breezes fan the trees-es," etc.'

Sir Dulcimer Dunder is a sketch of a deaf man passionately fond of music. He would recover his hearing *now*, when it has become the practice to take it away from common organs by the infernal noise made by the Germans. In this view of it, Colman says, 'Lady Towzer could never hear but in a mill. The clack of common conversation made no sort of impression on her. And Lord Thickness, for the very same reason, built his fine new house over against a trunk-maker, and next door to a pewterer.'

Sprightly, however, delivers the taste and principles of the new managers. 'The old drama, opera, and pantomime may, indeed, dance the hayes on the stage, like the sun, moon, and earth, in *The Rehearsal*—sometimes one in eclipse, and sometimes another. Opera or pantomime may for a season cause a temporary obscurity, as the dull earth may now and then stand in its own light; but tragedy and comedy, like the sun and moon, will continue to be the life, delight, and chief support of the English Theatre.'

Hear our exquisite Phelim on this figurative eloquence.

'*Phelim.* By my sowle he has so boddered me with eyes and ears and eclipses, that I am quite in the dark, my dear.'

The piece ends with a prophetic prologue, 'that the old

stage will run for ever.' The vehicle then must be neat, the horses sound, the straw clean, and the driver sober.

Murphy wrote *News from Parnassus* for Covent Garden Theatre, and his prelude, too, wafted incense towards Garrick at Hampton.

'*Boccalini.* Shakespeare himself retired to the banks of the Avon, and he wishes Roscius a happy retreat on the bank of the Thames. Apollo has decreed him a laurel-crown for his services, and has promised him a new wreath, should he again appear for the theatrical fund, or upon any other occasion.'

Murphy's Rebus certainly suggested the moral drama to Sheridan's Sneer, and Vellum has honoured Mr. Puff with some newspaper suggestions. Murphy did too much here for a prelude, and too little for a farce. Colman hit the exact trifle.

One rule, however, Murphy has laid down to managers, which should govern all revivals of our great authors. 'If new plays of value cannot be had, let them revive the old, but be sparing of alterations. They may lop excrescences, and remove indecency; but the form in which the fathers of the drama left their works shows their own frame of thought, and ought to be respected.' But even such a principle cannot be allowed to operate upon editions of an author's works. Because they who cannot make allowances for changing manners are no fit readers of such books. And youth may be suffered to delay the perusal of works which maturity alone should meddle with, on many accounts.

When Bowdler mentioned his scheme of a purified Shakespeare to Dr. Harrington—'No, no, sir,' said the old gentleman, 'let us, when we have the woodcock, enjoy the little trail on the toast.' One of the wittiest illustrations that I have ever heard. But so it is:—finding in that great man a stream of ethical knowledge fertilising his various soil, we are for constituting him the sole teacher of morals; and extract his aphorisms as substitute for graver authorities.

We are so fond of this fancied *Academus* of ours, the playhouse, that we have begun to invest the player himself with a sort of philosophic dignity: from one extreme we

have passed to another, and as Johnson deemed a player too low to be honoured even with gratitude for the good he had done,[1] so we seem to think him morally too high to be endured in the common disorders of his species. In the case of an actor, whose habits of life were long known to us—when his profligacy could surprise no one, and the other parties were none of the purest—a critic of the new school turns round upon the luckless peripatetic (stroller) and demands, in a voice of thunder, how he dares to be a culprit, with the moral sentiments of Shakespeare nightly flowing from his lips? But if the reader will attentively peruse the CLII. sonnet of Shakespeare, and refer its subject to the feelings of some persons alive when he wrote it, he will see that he might turn in this way upon the great moral teacher himself, and ask how he dared to display unblemished purity to the admiration and study of the world?

He who like Shakespeare embraced the sum of life, and wrote in a manner little artificial and systematic, supplies not the formal but the just demands of every occasion; he cannot therefore but abound in beauties both moral and descriptive: some of these, dragged from their proper places, become the favourites of the superficial, and pass as a common coin in conversation. They give an appearance of reading to idleness, and of taste to 'coarse complexions.' Their recitation is usually attended by a seeming rush of sensibility, and forms one of the grateful triumphs of affectation over the laborious and unlettered.

Even on the stage these beauties sometimes produce a ludicrous effect—ludicrous I mean from the disproportion as to the cause. That part of the audience which has had its taste formed by one of the popular selections, in the performance of a play is most attentive to what it best knows, the fine things extracted. A slight whisper is heard in the house just before the admired passage is delivered, followed by immense applause when it is concluded. The actor, always disposed to refer this to himself, learns to humour this tendency in the audience by an awful preparation and

[1] He justified Savage, because he thought him forsooth a nobleman, for not recording his obligations to Mrs. Oldfield's bounty.

more sonorous declamation. Let the reader remember the 'baseless fabric' of Prospero,—the 'seven ages' of Jaques,—the 'quality of mercy' of Portia,—the 'patience on a monument' of Viola; and consider how false a delivery of them on the stage has resulted from the particular expectation thus excited.

But Heraclitus himself would laugh at the instance I am going to commemorate in Othello. There is in this play a very civil, modest, silent gentlewoman, who is the wife o Othello's ensign, and who has the honour to attend upon the great captain's captain, the virtuous Desdemona. The Christian name of this lady (for by the baptismal name only either she or her husband is known through the play) is Emilia. Now, after this lady is once introduced to us in the acted play, she says nothing of the slightest moment, and does but one thing of any consequence, namely, to steal the handkerchief upon which her lady set so great a value. We look at the actress who personates this character, and soon find that she entertains a very different notion of its importance. Kept unwillingly in the background, longing to break forth and show the wonders of her voice and the energy of her action, she contrives by out-dressing her lady, and the aid of a rich plume of feathers, to do almost nothing through four tedious acts, but waves her promise to the spectators that, at last, their patience shall be repaid. The happy moment arrives; Othello throws off all reserve, abuses his wife in the grossest language, and leaves her as much amazed as grieved. Iago enters to comfort her. Then comes Emilia's turn, and forth she rushes to pronounce the following favourite morceau.

'*Emil.* I will be hanged, if some eternal villain,
Some busy and insinuating rogue,
Some cogging cozening slave, to get some office,
Have not devised this slander; I'll be hang'd else.
Iago. Fie, there is no such man; it is impossible.
Des. If any such there be, heaven pardon him!
Emil. A halter pardon him! and hell gnaw his bones!
Why should he call her whore; who keeps her company?
What time? what place? what form? what likelihood?
The Moor's abused by some outrageous knave,
Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow:
Oh, heaven, that such companions thou'dst unfold
And put in every honest hand a whip
To lash the rascal naked through the world!'

Here, taking her ground upon the virtuous indignation of the audience, the actress becomes a perfect fury; and, as if she waved the brand of Tisiphone, or rather the whip of the beadle, parades herself to the lamps in a semicircle, and speaks thunder to the gods themselves. Those generous deities, scorning to be outdone in noise, send down a roar to 'tear hell's concave.' The actress in consequence has to boast through life how she used to get six rounds of applause in the part; and how she beat the gentle Desdemona (perhaps Mrs. Siddons) to a dead standstill by this overstrained and vulgar violence.[1]

Of late years it has been even worse; for measuring, I suppose, the efficacy of the chastisement by the vigour of the arm, if they have fortunately, in the company of either theatre, a lady of the heroic frame, 'and more than common tall,' she is always the representative of Emilia: and should any timid daughter of Melpomene make her *début* in the part of Desdemona, the amazon, like another Glumdalclitch, immediately assumes the care of her!—struts by her side, or overshadows her in the rear, until the proper moment arrives of stifling all her puny exertion as above, and the Moor succeeds to smother her altogether.

All this absurdity has made it apparent, to me at least, that the only proper corrector of natural but mischievous importance is some great actor, like Garrick, at the head of a theatre:—his judgment will be too sound to be disturbed, his authority too great to be resisted. The manager who is not an actor will seldom go into the minutiæ of the business, and if he delegate the task to one who is, the command is often resisted or sullenly obeyed. I have weighed the detriment to both author and actor, from the whole power of a theatre being in the hands of a man who may be both; I consider the many prejudices he may form, and one preference that he must entertain;—but in my opinion so much is gained by the unity in his operations, and the steady pressure of his interest, that I should insure to a

[1] That Shakespeare himself repressed, with all his might, the tendency to such display is obvious by the few words which close the speech—

'Even from the east to the west.'

But the corrective, on the stage, is judiciously omitted.

theatre so managed, on the whole, the best dramatic pieces and the best instructed performers.

The mimic stage has its realities, and death, so often repeated there in jest, happens once to all in earnest. The habits of some actors seem to put him constantly out of sight; but their course of life inevitably accelerates his approach. To none more truly than to the low comedian does the following passage apply:—

> 'Merely thou art Death's fool;
> For him thou labour'st by thy flight to shun,
> And yet run'st tow'rd him still.'
>
> *M. for M.* act III. sc. I.

Such is the reflection with which the historian of the stage feels himself called upon to record the death of Shuter, on the 1st of November 1776.

> 'Upon such sacrifices the Gods themselves drop incense,'

for poor Ned was indeed the delight of the galleries. His humour was broad and voluptuous, but never seemed richer than conviviality produces:—the bottle was the sun of his table, and he neither had, nor sought, any higher inspiration. Yet he was an enthusiast in his worship, and enthusiasm led him into excess. Unthinking levity commonly borders on vice. Shuter, I have heard, added gaming to ebriety, and lost his money commonly soon after his wits. The supplies would frequently run low, and friends, however wanted, were not always at home. On such occasions the irregular son of merriment is apt to trust to the common refuge of the needy; but he kept up his spirits only to the 48th year of his age, when they sunk for ever into that receptacle of humour, St. Paul's, Covent Garden. If the genius of its great architect ever revisits what he made the handsomest barn in Europe, long busied himself in masks, he may admit the actor willingly within its precincts; but the sometimes savage horrors of a Westminster election all good taste would proscribe from such a spot.

The habits of life are much altered since Shuter's time; the common tavern existence is now unknown. An eccentric, like Kean, for instance, may prefer the easy readiness of public entertainment to domestic enjoyment; but the

coffee-houses are no longer crowded in the evening, they sink into tap-rooms, and are frequented only by the lower orders. We are become more literary, and more scientific. We have reading-rooms everywhere, and lectures upon experimental philosophy. Gentlemen ambitious of such distinction are at home to the cultivators of art and science on certain evenings of the town season. The host displays his collection of magnificent works, with every convenience to consult them; his hospitality adds the suitable refreshments to the higher luxuries of taste. Men, of whatever pursuits, know where to meet others like themselves; and our Drydens and Addisons, (such as they are) frequent no longer either Will's or Button's. But at certain conversaziones they are sure to be found, where the master of the house, at the door of his saloon, stands ready to offer his hand to every comer; and an ancient philosopher might have repeated the remark made as to the brazen statues at the gates of Rome:—

> 'Signa manus dextras ostendunt attenuati.
> Sæpe salutantatum tactu.' *Lucret.* B. I. v. 318

The player, like other men, partakes of the purer manners of his age. The profession is for the most part rather above than below the middle standard. Still, perhaps, a little inflated by its rise in esteem, the actor proudly names the noble by whom he is countenanced; and, by the importance which he attaches to the connection, shows that he considers it a courtesy rather than a right. However, without elevating our players into the chair of the moralist, and looking upon them simply as the professors of an elegant art, every sound mind must rejoice that the old prejudice against the stage exists but in the region which originally put it down, the abode of fanaticism and rebellion.

We have already had occasion to notice, in the instance of Mrs. Siddons, the encouragement which the new managers did not give; we have now to look at that which they did, and we may dimly picture to ourselves some of the motives which might possibly interest the young and little scrupulous Sheridan. The late Mrs. Robinson had been educated by Hannah More. Her father, Captain Darby,

had been unsuccessful in trade, and his misfortunes impaired his health; he died, and left his accomplished daughter totally without provision, beautiful as an angel, and as fond of poetry as Miss More herself. She had in the school displayed a striking tendency to the stage, and a lady who shared the education of Miss Darby there has often repeated to me the instances of her early love of acting.

Mr. Garrick, as she once told me, pointed out Cordelia to her as a trial part, and showed his lovely pupil what she would have to bear from his exquisite performance of Lear. But Mr. Robinson ended, for a time at least, this serious design; the young attorney passionately struck with her—

> 'Stept in with his receipt for making smiles,
> And blanching sables into bridal bloom.'

But this only delayed the experiment, the match was every way unfortunate; in a little time they wanted the common comforts of life; and unfortunately indeed for them both, they wanted principle, by which such evils may always be surmounted or endured. Flattery soon withdrew the guards that reason had placed about beauty. He who should have commanded the garrison betrayed his trust—the husband made a sacrifice of his honour. Then establishments were soon seen, of which the means were invisible; the die was thrown that sealed the condition of the enchanting Maria, and she became in melancholy reality the Perdita. I am, however, here to remember that she made her first appearance on the 10th of December, 1776, at Drury Lane Theatre, in the character of Juliet. My father had known her from infancy, and on this occasion was induced to visit the theatre. He told me that the interest about her was of a melancholy cast, but that it resulted from the peculiar expression of her face, rather than the tones of her voice. He thought her languid and unimpassioned, and added, no doubt sincerely, that the pathos of Juliet had been felt only in Mrs. Cibber, with whom he would enthusiastically maintain, no 'creature of earth's mould' could possibly be compared in Juliet and Monimia. He used, perhaps not unhappily, to call her the nightingale of the stage. When, some years afterwards, I had the happi-

ness to attend him to the performances of Mrs. Siddons, and remarked the melancholy tenderness of her voice, he said, I remember, 'It must be powerful indeed, for I should have considered her form too dignified to allow of the sympathy which she excites. Cibber, sir, seemed to need and dispose of your tears from the delicacy of her frame.'

I will not presume to suppose the person, who will be ever dear to me, biassed in these opinions; and he admired Mrs. Siddons to the full bent of younger followers in Isabella and Belvidera. He conceived her to be even sublime in Euphrasia, and the Zara of Congreve's tragedy. But I am now become myself an aged admirer, and must be careful to preserve the candour which I have ventured to applaud.

On the 14th of this month, a manufacture of some translation of Voltaire's tragedy, called *Semiramis*, was presented to the public, already inducted into the purity of French feeling by Garrick's alteration of *Hamlet*.[1] Perhaps the great actor's greatest fault originated from the false and flippant absurdity by which Voltaire disgraced the preface to *Semiramis*. Let us look a little into these irresistible temptations from the Frenchman, which even the veneration of Garrick for Shakespeare could not withstand. *Hamlet* is, it seems, on the whole, 'une pièce grossière et barbare, qui ne serait pas supportée par la plus vile populace de la France et de l'Italie.' But it may be reasonably inquired what there is in this unfortunate tragedy, which the patrons of Punch in France and Italy, and even the vilest, mark, of them, could not possibly endure. Hamlet goes mad in the second act, and his mistress in the third. 'Hamlet y devient fou au second acte, et sa maîtresse devient folle au troisième.' Now the first part of this assertion is false: Hamlet does not become mad in the second

[1] If I should here again be told, on the authority of Dr. Moncey, a man who well knew Garrick, that 'such were his awe and veneration for Shakespeare, he never could have, in the doctor's opinion, made the horrible mutilation of the poet's *Hamlet* to which I have alluded,' I then reply to this, and a former observation of a similar nature, that I have great respect for Dr. Moncey, but cannot allow any opinion of his, or the report of it, to weigh against fact and evidence. The alteration of the play still exists, and Mr. Garrick acted that alteration of the play the last time he performed the character.

act, or in any act; though I once heard this gravely asserted by an actor, who, I much fear, carried his notion into his performance. One proof of this insanity, I remember, he even specified upon that occasion, namely, that Hamlet fancied himself counterfeiting madness, a delusion which he affirmed the mad were constantly falling into! Such meteors are hypotheses, originally started by eccentric minds, or in other words warm heads, and caught up as grounds of distinction and triumph over less subtle predecessors. To go on with M. de Voltaire. 'Le Prince tue le père de sa maîtresse, feignant de tuer un rat.' This is ignorance, the expression being purely metaphorical. Hamlet is neither mad nor feigned madness in the Queen's closet. Hearing some one exclaim for 'help' behind the arras, and fancying, perhaps hoping, that it was the vile usurper, who was thus collecting evidence in secret, he runs at him with his rapier, and undesignedly puts Polonius to death. However, let Voltaire tell his own story—He kills the father of his mistress, feigning to kill a rat, 'et l'héroïne se jette dans la rivière.' And the heroine throws herself into the river.—The heroine! O, this wretched flippancy, what 'ignorant sins' does it not force these gay spirits to commit! Alas, the 'fair Ophelia,' the 'dear maid,' the 'kind sister,' the 'most best,' the 'beatified Ophelia' is no heroine! She is no native of the French school, though her misery has been ridiculed by more than the vilest populace of France or of Italy. Neither does she throw herself into the river. But in a mild, an innocent, and fanciful delirium, she passes her time in weaving garlands of flowers, and strives to hang them upon the melancholy willow that grew aslant the brook. The bough to which she was clinging breaks under the weight of the lovely enthusiast, and her trophies and herself are precipitated into the stream:—there, insensible of her danger, she continues to chant the tender snatches of old hymns that memory, no longer under the control of reason, continued, from mere habit, to supply, till the song itself was drowned with the unfortunate musician! And we are to endure, under the title of refined taste, that a buffoon should thus travesty the creations of immortal genius.

But to proceed with Ophelia, or rather Voltaire. 'On fait sa fosse sur le théâtre; des fossoyeurs disent des quolibets dignes d'eux, en tenant dans leur mains des têtes de morts: le Prince Hamlet répond à leurs grossièretés abominables par des folies non moins dégoûtantes.' They do make the grave of Ophelia upon the stage; and still make it there, because, however disgusting, perhaps terrible, the grave may be to the scoffer, Shakespeare has here rendered it the soil of infinite beauties; and, passing literally from grave to gay, he has made the gravedigger utter his rude and natural language, and the condescension of a Prince, unknown to be so, reply to him in his own fashion. With respect to the skulls, so loathsome to our philosopher, they are equally so to Hamlet; but remember the important lesson which is suggested by that of Yorick, and wonder that any portion of our common nature could be cold to so much affectionate wisdom.

'*Ham.* Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath borne me on his back a thousand times: and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! my gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips, that I have kissed, I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning? quite chap-fallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that.'

Our critic continues his detail. 'Pendant ce temps-là, un des acteurs fait la conquête de la Pologne.' This is not true, it is only a frontier garrisoned town, and might be taken by assault in a few hours. But, with a happy remembrance of the French *fête des rois*, his indignation is roused at the scandalous indecency of royal persons drinking upon the stage. 'Hamlet, sa mère, et son beau-père boivent ensemble (drink together) 'sur le théâtre'—like porters meeting at the door of a cabaret. The reader knows to what this alludes, and his knowledge of ancient customs will furnish him with numberless instances of the cup of wine passing, as much from ceremony as refreshment, among the great of former ages. 'On chante à table, on s'y

querelle, on se bat, on se tue.' They (I suppose the parties who have been drinking together) sing at table, they quarrel (fall out in their cups), fight and kill each other. This is total misrepresentation. However, we must not omit the elegant summary with which the criticism is wound up. 'On croirait que cet ouvrage est le fruit de l'imagination d'un sauvage ivre.' One would think this work proceeded only from the imagination of a drunken savage. I must, however, respectfully insinuate, that the sovereigns of France, even in modern times, dined publicly among their courtiers, and the Théâtre Français, either with respect to its customs or its language, never had any other model than the court of Louis the Fourteenth.

To the Ghost, however, our philosophic poet is even complimentary.—'L'ombre du père d'Hamlet est un des coups de théâtre les plus frappants. Il fait toujours un grand effet sur les Anglais' (and mark his address); 'je dis sur ceux qui sont le plus instruits, et qui sentent le mieux toute l'irrégularité de leur ancien théâtre.' How dexterously he compliments the 'right hand file,' whom the inferior genius of his nation had corrupted, and who, in spite of their perfect feeling of the eccentricity of the 'drunken savage,' were yet alive to the trembling prejudices of infancy, and spell-bound by the awful charms of the great magician! I am afraid among these English *le plus instruits*, he numbered Pope and Bolingbroke and Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, and, looking to the tragedy of *Cato*, so studiously avoiding Shakespeare, to the great Addison himself.

But in his *Semiramis*, Voltaire has a ghost of a very extraordinary kind indeed. He is no visitant by moonlight, who is condemned in the day-time to fast in fires; from the bosom of his own monument he advances, in the broad glare of the sun, and once more annoys the drawing-room of Semiramis. We will just examine the language in which the terrors of the court, and the oracular pleasure of the shade, are expressed, by one who affected to pity the bad taste of Shakespeare. Perhaps even through the commonplace terms used by Voltaire on this occasion it may be obvious that he remembered his master, and saw how hopeless the task was which he had undertaken.

SEMIRAMIS.

Le ciel tonne sur nous ; est-ce faveur ou haine ?[1]
Grâce, dieux tout-puissants ![2] qu'Arsace me l'obtienne.
Quels funèbres accents redoublent mes terreurs ?
La tombe s'est ouverte : il paraît—Ciel ! je meurs.

[*Here the ghost of Ninus quits the tomb.*]

ASSUR.

L'ombre de Ninus même ! ô dieux ! est-il possible ?

ARZACE.

Eh bien ![3] qu'ordonnes-tu ? parle-nous, dieu terrible.

ASSUR.

Parle.

SEMIRAMIS.

Veux-tu me perdre ? ou veux-tu pardonner ?
C'est ton sceptre et ton lit que je viens de donner ;
Juge si ce héros est digne de ta place.
Prononce : j'y consens.

L'OMBRE, À ARZACE.

Tu régneras, Arzace :
Mais il est des forfaits que dois expier
Dans ma tombe, à ma cendre il faut sacrifier.
Sers et mon fils et moi ; souviens-toi de ton père :
Écoute le pontife.

ARZACE.

Ombre que je révère,
Demi-dieu dont l'esprit anime ces climats,
Ton aspect m'encourage et ne m'étonne pas.
Oui, j'irai dans ta tombe au péril de ma vie.
Achève ; que veux-tu que ma main sacrifie ?

[*The ghost returns to the door of the tomb.*]

Il s'éloigne, il nous fuit ![4]

[1] Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell ;
Be thy intents wicked or charitable.

[2] Angels, and ministers of grace, defend us.

[3] Say, why is this ? wherefore ? what shall we do ?
Speak to me. Stay and speak.

[4] 'Tis gone, and will not answer.

In the latter part of the scene he has not disdained to consult the page of *Julius Cæsar*, in which his shade appears to Brutus.

SEMIRAMIS.

Ombre de mon époux,
Permets qu'en ce tombeau j'embrasse tes genoux,
Que mes regrets—

L'OMBRE, *à la porte.*

Arrête, et respecte ma cendre ;
Quand il en sera temps, je t'y ferai descendre.

On this extravagant, useless, unintelligible piece of mystification, where nothing is revealed, and the spectre merely mows and chatters, and then bites the people whom he haunts, like the goblins set upon another drunken savage, Caliban, I wish to do no more than place its trash by the side of Shakespeare. As to the moderate and modern request of Semiramis, 'Permit me, in your tomb, to embrace your knees'—I must in candour remark that, the scene lying in Babylon, the supplication was not so utterly ridiculous as it might sound. The practice of embalming happily prepared the royal relics for such excursions ; the extravagant and erring spirit had only to repair again to its mortal, but not dissevered structure, and march out the mummy itself in the splendid apparatus of the tomb. The wisdom of the Egyptians, and their taste, somewhat encumbered the world I confess ; and they peopled their edifices as much by the dead as the living. Yet the importance thus attached to their progenitors by the Egyptians, as well as the American Indians, may be received as more than a mark of self-love ; and the rites of those nations would never have been offered to the body if an immortal hope had not suggested to the son that they might somehow be grateful to the liberated spirit of the sire.

As to Captain Ayscough's tragedy, which originated the above remarks, I remember once to have read it, and at least applauded the discretion with which he presented the ghost of Ninus only to his widow and his son. But he was a feeble writer, a man of fashion, who hankered after literary fame, and did some little service by editing the miscellaneous works of his uncle, Lord Lyttelton.

On the 19th of March 1776 Barry and his wife, as I have already observed, acted for the benefit of Woodward.

Old Bannister, who was 'nothing if not mimical,' played Jaques once in imitation of Barry, then near his close; for on the 11th of January 1777 he died at his house in Norfolk Street, and was buried in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey on the 20th. Barry and Mossop and Sheridan had the honour, in their narrow range, to dispute some of the great parts in tragedy with Mr. Garrick. Upon Sheridan I can feel no difficulty to pronounce. I have heard him declaim in various composition, and can be quite sure that whatever opinion might attach to him as an accurate, a sensible, and a very manly actor, his voice was too harsh, and his expression too dull, to allow of any near approach to the most brilliant actor that perhaps ever lived. Barry, as one of the finest and most elegant figures that existed, with a voice that was usually styled the voice of love, might, in the Jaffiers and Romeos of the stage, sometimes leave the female breast in some little, or even in no doubt as to the preference between them. The sons of Erin I believe never thought that Spranger Barry could have a superior. In Othello he stood alone.

I have heard that his lovely wife had by no means the happiest temper in the world; but he left her, notwithstanding, all that he had to leave; and I shall here record a copy of his will in her favour, which I do not know to have been previously published, as it is short, and shows his circumstances at the close of life.

(COPY.)

'I, Spranger Barry, of King Street, in the parish of Saint Paul, Covent Garden, Esquire, do make this my last will and testament, as follows—I give, devise, and bequeath to my wife Ann Barry, formerly Ann Dancer, her executors, administrators, and assigns, my house, held by lease for fifty years, at Stretham in Surry, with all the furniture belonging to the same—And also the Theatre Royal in Crow Street, Dublin, with the dwelling-house adjoining to it, and the ground near thereto, now unlet, together with the wardrobe, scenes, furniture and other things belonging to the said theatre, or appertaining thereto, with its rights, members,

privileges and appurtenances, and all my right, title, interest, property and claim in and to the same and every part thereof. To have and to hold the said messuage, theatre and premises, with the appurtenances, unto the said Ann Barry, her heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, to the only proper use and behalf of the said Ann Barry, her heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, for ever; subject nevertheless, to the payment of two several annuities of sixty pounds and forty pounds to James Carter, during the respective lives of Ann Carter and Julia Carter, and charged upon the said premises by indenture, bearing date the twenty-third day of April, one thousand seven hundred and sixty-eight, for the purpose therein mentioned. All the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate and effects whatsoever and wheresoever, real and personal, I give, devise, and bequeath unto the said Ann Barry, her heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns. And I make, constitute, and appoint her, the said Ann Barry, to be sole executor (*sic*) of this my will, and hereby revoking all other wills by me made, I declare this to be my last will and testament. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal, this twenty-fourth day of January one thousand seven hundred and seventy.

SPRANGER BARRY. L. S.

'Signed, sealed, published, and declared, by the said Spranger Barry, as and for his last will and testament, in the presence of us, who, in his presence, at his request, and in the presence of each other, have set our names as witnesses to the execution hereof.

'DAVID RICHARDS.

'ALBANY WALLIS (almost the legal guardian of actors).

'HARRY BURT, Clerk to Mr. Wallis.'

The reader might indeed complain if, after showing how he disposed of his property, I declined to record how his friend and countryman, Murphy, disposed of his merits as an actor:—

> 'Harmonious Barry! with what varied art
> His grief, rage, tenderness assail'd the heart!
> Of plaintive Otway now no more the boast!
> And Shakespeare grieves for his Othello lost.

Oft on this spot the tuneful Swan expir'd,
Warbling his grief; you listen'd and admir'd.
'Twas then but fancied woe; now every Muse,
Her lyre unstrung, with tears his urn bedews.'

On the 1st of February, 1777, a tragedy was acted at Covent Garden Theatre, called *Sir Thomas Overbury*. That, at all events, unfortunate man, Savage, with a perseverance that indicated very limited powers for the drama, had written a second tragedy on this his favourite subject. Cave bought it, and it was touched upon by Garrick and Colman and William Woodfall. I think it was not quite peculiar to Savage, though he would be more indignant than other men at the practice, that there was supposed to exist some stage mystery, in which only certain persons were initiated; and accordingly it was suggested to Savage that he ought to put his play into the hands of Thomson and Mallet to be made fit for representation:—as if Savage, a man who had led a town life, and had some power even as an actor, wanted any stage knowledge that Thomson or Mallet could supply! But thus even the genius of the unfortunate is constantly insulted, and a play that does not tread the beaten track is driven from the course, or broke in to the required sameness by the empiricism of a manager's advisers. This has produced among us, of late years, an invariable *coup de théâtre* in the last act of all serious dramas:—A castle must be besieged, a mine must be sprung, and the spectators must be dazzled, and stunned, and suffocated, for effect. The passion of Love has much to answer, as engrossing the great bulk of our drama, and compelling catastrophes that differ only as to happiness or misery, death or marriage:—but the image of War has taken its turn to reign—our triumphs of late as a great military power have crowded our stages with regular armies (not prompter's troops), bands from the parade, and banners which surpass the long unequalled cognizances of the Lord Mayor's Show.

In Savage we have been considering a man far from amiable, whom modern discoveries affirm even to have been an impostor; but to whom some weight attaches from his connection with Dr. Johnson, and must for ever attach, in consequence of a biography, written in the feelings of friendship, but with the spirit of moral wisdom.

On the 3d of February died Hugh Kelly, a dramatist of slender power, a man of humble and modest diligence. He had dared to write in support of government, and when, in the stormy days of Wilkes and Junius, he addressed his *Word to the Wise* from the stage, a faction damned it on its first appearance. His widow and children now derived assistance from this sentenced play, which Dr. Johnson, another Hercules, restored, like Alcestis, from the shades. He wrote a prologue, in his mildest tone, yet full of moral dignity and beauty :—

> 'Where aught of bright or fair the piece displays,
> Approve it only—'tis too late to praise.
> If want of skill or want of care appear,
> Forbear to hiss—the poet cannot hear.
> By all like him must praise and blame be found
> At best a fleeting gleam, or empty sound.'

But excelling this infinitely is the close, in which he announces the triumph of benevolence :—

> 'Yet then shall calm reflection bless the night,
> When liberal pity dignify'd delight ;
> When Pleasure fired her torch at Virtue's flame,
> And Mirth was bounty with an humbler name.'

Pope, by infinite pains, elaborated his composition into verse like this :—the early and continued discipline of Johnson's mind, I persuade myself, made him flow, without present labour, in such correct and perfect expression.

CHAPTER IV

THE author suits his own convenience in the distribution of his work into chapters. Were he to consider time, I mean so much of it as constitutes a season, as the measure of a chapter, the division must be long or short with the importance of its events. When, therefore, any subjects claim very particular consideration, the reader may not regret that what would otherwise branch out too far is divided, and that two chapters may pass between the winter and the summer of any given year.

On the 22d of February 1777, Arthur Murphy produced, at Covent Garden Theatre, his admirable comedy of *Know your own Mind*, a play written with, I think, more care than he commonly bestowed; the dialogue being much more pointed, the consequence probably of frequent revision, and possessing much of that charm which Vanbrugh taught in his comedies—language easy to be spoken. However, often as he might revise his work, he has repeated a phrase, and that, unfortunately for his taste, a vulgarism, in two pages exactly opposite to each other; and both from the mouth of the same speaker, and his wit moreover, Dashwood. The reader will find them in the printed collection of Murphy's works, vol. iv. pp. 22, 23. '*Up to his eyes* Sir Richard was in love with her,'—and of Millamour also—'*Up to the eyes* in love with Lady Bell.' There was a good deal of coquetry at times about Murphy—'he had productions by him, but who were to act them?' *Know your own Mind* had been kept even longer than Horace requires, as the author assures us in his prologue. This I fancy is not to be understood as to its integrity, but that he had retained

a play upon the subject ten years in his possession. I make this remark because I incline to think Foote's Lady Kitty Crocodile the original of Murphy's Mrs. Bromley. The names of Murphy's comedy are for the most part significant or characteristic. We have Millamour, Dashwood, Malvil, Lovewit, and so on; but his very unamiable widow, as if to banish all idea of the Crocodile, is called, very insignificantly, Mrs. Bromley. Yet it is beyond all measure strange that what was, I have no doubt, designed to conceal the plagiarism, absolutely reveals it, and this name is found in a speech of Lady Kitty, who thus insults her protégée, Miss Lydall: 'There was your mother; did not I, by my own single interest, get her into the alms-house at *Bromley*?'

Foote was ready with this piece in the year 1776. It seems nearly incredible that any woman of rank should obtain an injunction, on the plea that Lady Kitty was a libel, and personal to herself. Did the Duchess of Kingston imagine that she monopolised all simulated affection for the dead, and the tyranny of patronage for the living? Foote at table, to be sure, might be more explicit than upon paper, and by mimicry leave no doubt at whom he was driving. But on the stage, who would think of appropriating vices so common?

> 'Who can come in, and say that I mean her?
> When such a one as she, such is her neighbour.'
> —*As You Like It.*

As the *Trip to Calais* was not printed until Colman, in 1778, started it, much augmented, as the *Capuchin*, Murphy derived his acquaintance with Lady Kitty from Foote's convivial display of her Ladyship at table; a mode of entertainment peculiar to himself, but which Doctor Johnson pronounced to be irresistible.

To return more particularly to *Know your own Mind*, Murphy after his long delay was at last unfortunate—for Woodward, who had hoped to close his stage career brilliantly in Dashwood, was seized about this time with the illness of which he died, and had, instead of the mimic, his mortal career to attend to.

It was once reported of Shakespeare, 'that he was obliged

to kill Mercutio in the third act, lest he should have been killed by him.' Dryden thought it no such difficulty to sustain him through five acts. Murphy has, in my opinion, performed a higher task in maintaining the fire of Dashwood in undiminished brightness to the end.

In my time we have never possessed more than half of a stage representative for him. King could have keenly and neatly spoken his sarcasms, but he never could look as if he enjoyed them. Lewis, a little restrained, might have exhibited much of his untiring hilarity and boundless satire; but Lewis could never utter a pointed sentence intelligibly. Lee Lewes was always vulgar, and, with a bad manner of utterance, was obviously below the conception of thought and expression equally refined and amusing. He spoke, odd as the comparison may be thought, as a man walks who has a wooden leg, and every second word stumped upon the ear. This he caught, and, except the action of Harlequin, it was all he did catch from Woodward.

By one single trick, the screen in the *School for Scandal*, besides that he had the power of management to aid him, Sheridan threw Murphy from his supremacy. The point, the invention, the facility of Murphy in *Know your own Mind* are astonishing. Sheridan wrote with amazing difficulty, and as to what he borrowed, with great effrontery. The *School for Scandal* and the *Critic* both attest the great use Sheridan made of his predecessor. Perhaps I may be permitted a few proofs of what I have commended in Murphy. The politician who knots his motions on his handkerchief—'And so on he goes, till his handkerchief is twisted into questions of state; the liberties and fortunes of all posterity dangling like a bede-roll; he puts it in his pocket, drives to the gaming-table,—the next morning his handkerchief goes to the wash, and his country and the minority are both left in the suds.'

Nor is his female quidnunc less entertaining. Mrs. Macaulay sure herself. 'She is a politician in petticoats; a fierce republican; she talks of the dagger of Brutus while she settles a pin in her tucker; and says more about ship-money than pin-money.'

How sparkling and unaffected what follows!—

'MILLAMOUR.

'When pleasantry is out of all time and place—

'DASHWOOD.

'Why then I shall be tired of all time and place.'

Again soon after,

'MALVIL.

'I—I—I am apt to carry my heart at my tongue's end.'

'DASHWOOD.

'I knew his heart was not in the right place.'

With similar readiness also—

'BYGROVE.

'Take my advice, and don't lose your friend for your joke.

'DASHWOOD.

'By no means—except now and then when the friend is the worst of the two.'

Murphy's scholarship was considerable; he has written largely in Latin verse, and cultivated it like his friend, Doctor Johnson, through life. When I estimate his various powers, his conversation, his high-toned manners, and see all that he achieved as to fortune, I am ready to burst out in one of the exclamations of *Know your own Mind*—

'Show a man of letters to the first of your nobility, and they will leave him to starve in a garret. Introduce a fellow who can sing a catch (sometimes only catch a tune), write a dull political pamphlet, or play off fireworks, and he shall pass six months in the country, by invitation.'

What ever constituted an exception to this ungenerous and silly neglect? The passion of some lady for literary distinction—the desire to display her own acquisitions, and to extend them. Such a one will surround her husband's table with those who alone can be its ornaments. Such was the taste of Mrs. Thrale; and Streatham only could display together, of all our mansions of either rank or opulence, the members and the portraits of the literary club.

I have spoken of the representative of Dashwood. The other characters, with two exceptions, shared his fate.

Lewis, as far as his powers could represent Millamour's fickleness, by his gaiety only injured Dashwood. The ladies of the stage were rather below the *par* of politeness, with the exception of Mrs. Hartley, who, in all her golden beauty, acted the lovely interest of Miss Neville. The author could not have wished a more perfect face and form than this lady displayed upon the stage. When I look back, and around me, for anything to reflect her to those who have never seen her, I am obliged to say that the exquisite portrait by Sir Joshua did not do her entire justice, and that at last we must refer to the images of ripened beauty and modest dignity, with which the perhaps flattering fancies of her poets delighted to exhibit the person of the Virgin Queen.

Burgoyne, when he conceived the plan of the Alscrip family, under the name of Alton, led Miss Neville into a second martyrdom; and, like Murphy, found a beautiful representative of her in Mrs. Crouch: not that I can be of opinion the latter, by her fondest admirers, was ever compared in loveliness with Mrs. Hartley. However, her effect in *The Heiress* will not speedily be forgotten, and she had to sustain the brilliant expression of Miss Farren in *Lady Emily*.

In this comedy of *Know your own Mind*, the female glitter was thrown into the character of Lady Bell, then acted by Mrs. Mattocks. With every allowance for time, and the manners descending to parts below refinement, Mrs. Mattocks was not the representative of elegance and beauty. She spoke, however, with great point and vivacity, force, and meaning. I have seen her Lady Racket with much pleasure.

Woodward, as I have already stated, declined all new study, and considered his professional career as closed—however, he had promised to act on the 17th of March, for the benefit of the widow Barry, that his last performance might be an act of friendship; but his complaint had taken too strong a hold, and he was compelled to resign Sir Andrew and his accomplishments to little Quick, who always succeeded in producing merriment, though Sir Andrew was completely out of his range. In the comedy

of *Twelfth Night*, Woodward always sustained Sir Andrew Aguecheek with infinite drollery, assisted by that expression of rueful dismay which gave so peculiar a zest to his Marplot. In the latter character I have always understood that he wore 'this rue for a difference' between himself and Garrick, who it has been said, on high critical authority, was not quite at home in Marplot. Great efforts were made in the circle of his humble friends, to force this performance to a rivalry with Woodward; but the 'son of whim' remained unshaken. His unappeasable curiosity, slow comprehension, and annihilation under the sense of his dilemmas, were so diverting, that even the great master soon dropped the contest, and left him the decided Marplot of the stage.

Woodward lived only a month after the benefit of Mrs. Barry, for he died at his house in Chapel Street, Grosvenor Place, on Thursday the 17th of April 1777. He was in his 63rd year, having been born on the 2nd of October 1714. In the year 1728, when the *Beggar's Opera* was acted by Lilliputians, Harry Woodward performed the Beggar,—Mrs. Vincent, then Miss Binks, being Macheath on that occasion; so early did the humour appear for indecent travesty in this piece, brought out only the year before at Lincoln's-Inn Fields. It was soon after his study of these beggarly elements of the profession, that he became in due form Rich's apprentice, who taught him all that he knew of Pantomime; and Woodward had cultivated the arts of writing, and was rather fond of controversy. I believe him to have been commonly right—though the press is a public medium of display which I should always exhort the actor most strenuously to avoid.

Woodward had been careful beyond the measure of the comedian, and died in remarkably good circumstances. Mrs. Bellamy had resided *en amie* with him during the last ten years of his life, and benefited considerably in the disposition of his property. This excellent comedian was buried at St. George's, Hanover Square. Lee Lewes, in default of a better, had destined himself some way to succeed Woodward; and Sheridan, to whom everybody now turned as the rising muse, honoured his benefit with a few lines,

which he spoke in the character of Harlequin, to the memory of Woodward.

> 'But hence with tragic strains, unless to mourn
> That Lun and Marplot here shall ne'er return;
> The comic muse, who still with anxious pride
> The claim of motley Pantomime denied,
> Now humbly hangs o'er Woodward's recent bier,
> Sees the fantastic mimic mourner there,
> Yet deigns to join in grief, and sheds a kindred tear.'

In reference to an art which hurries faster than any other into oblivion I snatch with pride every votive garland of poetic flowers, and bid them, I hope not vainly, to bloom a little longer over departed genius.

When Mrs. Siddons quitted Drury Lane Theatre, at the end of her first season, the new management had come into full vigour, and it may be presumed that Sheridan looked only for supporters to the comic muse:—he was then rifling, or, as he feared, spoiling Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, and successfully composing his *School for Scandal*, on which his dramatic fame rests, and may rest securely. But whether he was actually blind, or partial, or indifferent, one gentleman, no mean judge of his profession, immediately engaged Mrs. Siddons for his theatre at Birmingham. There, under the management of Richard Yates, she acted the first business, and it was at Birmingham, in the summer of 1776, that Henderson first saw our greatest actress. He was immediately struck with her excellence, and pronounced that she would never be surpassed. He did more than this; he wrote directly to Palmer, the Bath manager, to advise an engagement of her without delay, as of the utmost importance to his concern,—but her cast of characters being at that time consigned by article to another lady, he could not immediately attend to Henderson's advice, which, however, did not sleep in his ear, for at Bath Mrs. Siddons nourished a fame in her art and a fashionable connection that together in a few years brought her to the metropolis in triumph.

The *Trip to Scarborough* is a purification of Vanbrugh's *Relapse*. The incident which gives name to the latter is the return to a life of gallantry, upon coming from the matrimonial felicity of retirement in the country. Sheridan



has very properly cut away all the mawkish colloquies between Loveless and his Amanda, written in a very unusual style, half blank verse, half prose. But when he ventured to save the virtue of Berinthia from the moonlight closet and the sofa, to which she is borne away by Loveless without a struggle, and even without a noise,—when she only trifles with him, to pique Townley, and Loveless, master of a present opportunity, lets the fair trifler escape for a promised meeting afterwards in the garden, all the brilliant language in the world could not atone for so flat an expedient. Not that Sheridan tried the experiment, for what he has written is beneath him.

The infamous male coupler becomes a female of the same name. The age that could endure the allusions in Vanbrugh's scenes must have been lost to all sense of decency. In the exquisite diction of Mr. Gibbon, 'I touch with reluctance, and dispatch with impatience, that odious vice, of which modesty rejects the name, and nature abominates the idea.'

Among the omissions of dialogue merely, there is not much to be regretted. I think, however, Foppington might have retained at Scarborough the ingenious display of his temperament in love.

'*Lord Fop.* Why, my heart in my amours is like my heart out of my amours—*à la glace.* My body, Tam, is a watch; and my heart is the pendulum to it; whilst the finger runs round to every hour in the circle, that still beats the same time.'

Perhaps imitated by Cowper as to reading the voyages of circumnavigators,

> 'While fancy, like the finger of a clock,
> Runs the great circle and is still at home.'
> —*Task.*

Sheridan wrote about a page of very poor stuff to bring in the fiddlers at the close and make a dancer of Sir Tunbelly, and his Berinthia, Mrs. Yates, dropped her curtsey after saying—'while the intention is evidently to please, British auditors will ever be indulgent to the errors of the performance.'

He had little variety certainly on such occasions, for his *Duenna* ends with the same thought:

> 'For generous guests like these
> Accept the wish to please.'

But I hasten to the appearance of the *School for Scandal*. I think it of importance to preserve the original cast of this comedy. The cast implies the author's ideas of his characters. The characters, rightly understood, will help a future age to estimate the powers of the actors. Why am I not as well able to convey the perfect impression of their performance?

Sir Peter Teazle	Mr. King.
Sir Oliver Surface	Mr. Yates.
Joseph Surface	Mr. Palmer.
Charles Surface	Mr. Smith.
Crabtree	Mr. Parsons.
Sir Benjamin Backbite	Mr. Dodd.
Rowley	Mr. Aickin.
Moses	Mr. Baddeley.
Trip	Mr. Lamash.
Snake	Mr. Packer.
Careless	Mr. Farren.
Sir Harry Bumper	Mr. Gawdry.
Lady Teazle	Mrs. Abington.
Maria	Miss P. Hopkins.
Lady Sneerwell	Miss Sherry.
Mrs. Candour	Miss Pope.

As Sheridan had built himself upon Congreve as to dialogue, so it was quite clear that, while composing, he meditated deeply how his thoughts were to be uttered, and his company fortunately possessed every variety of elocution. I think his comedy was better spoken in all its parts than any play that I have witnessed upon the stage. And I can safely add that, as to the acting of it, every change, to the present hour, has been a sensible diminution of the original effect. The lingered sentiment of Palmer, the jovial smartness of Smith, the caustic shyness of King, the brilliant loquacity of Abington, however congenial to the play, have long been silent. But as our ancient monasteries at the revival of letters, when they obtained some fair and perfect manuscript of a great work, allowed surrounding

foundations the advantage of a copy, and this copy again, in its turn, became an original to others; so the first actors of the *School for Scandal* were imitated throughout the country, and some portion of their excellence, by frequent transmission, must reach a distant age. And as in regard to those precious remains of antiquity to which I have compared them, some errors from hurry, from inferior knowledge, from misconception, have crept into the successive copies; so the clear and perfect style of the school of Garrick may be invaded by folly, and sullied by fancied improvement. Sheridan himself attended rehearsals, and fully approved the first exhibitors; an advantage which should stamp the highest value upon their performance, and leave it, if possible, secure from innovation. Where men, from want of skill, fail to imitate perfectly, let it be remembered that supplements in a different taste will never compensate the deficiency.

Murphy could not be expected to rival the effect of the *School for Scandal*, with whatever dexterity he had built upon the ground of Destouches. His interest was weaker, and his work afforded none of those pictures to the eye which are so essential to the drama. The cast of *Know your own Mind*, also, bore no comparison with that of the *School for Scandal*. It was creditable to Murphy to make the stand he did at Covent Garden. The season there was otherwise undistinguished, and presented the routine of common business. However, they secured some good nights by a performance of Mason's dramatic poem of *Caractacus*. Clarke, who was anything but first-rate, was the representative of the Briton King, and the beauty of Mrs. Hartley was a more powerful charm than any rites among the mysteries of Mona.

I am now to speak of one of those peculiar beings whom nature graces by some charm scarcely definable—by which all, however, are equally fascinated, and which they are destined to see pass away never to be replaced. I allude to the famous Miss Catley, the Syren, the Euphrosyne, the Juno, and, this season, the Mandane of Dr. Arne's *Artaxerxes*. Catley had a very brilliant and voluble execution, and she therefore executed the airs of Mandane, if

not in the Italian taste, with great neatness and powerful effect. As to her person and countenance she certainly had no striking characteristics of Mandane. Leoni was her Arbaces, whose falsetto had unrivalled sweetness, and Reinhold, a fine manly singer and excellent musician, performed Artabanes.

Comus was always a favourite afterpiece with the manager of Covent Garden Theatre—Catley, in Euphrosyne, was a bacchante of the first order; and the song of 'Sweet Echo' was added to her business, which Leoni in his falsetto echoed surprisingly. *The Golden Pippin* she immortalised by her Juno—*The Jovial Crew*, a worn-out pleasantry of a former age, revived in her Rachel—and the ballad opera existed in her attraction. To those who have never heard Miss Catley, I must, as my manner is, try to give some notion of what was peculiar to her. It was the singing of unequalled animal spirits, it was Mrs. Jordan's comedy carried into music—the something more, that a duller soul cannot conceive, and a feebler nerve dare not venture. Even at the close of her theatric life, when consumptive, and but the ghost of her former self, gasping even for breath, and wasting her little remaining vitality in her exertion, she would make sometimes a successful attempt at one of her former brilliant rushes of musical expression, and mingle a pleasing astonishment along with the pain you were compelled to suffer. No other female singer ever gave the slightest notion of her. She was bold, volatile, audacious; mistress of herself, of her talent, and her audience. Saville Carey I have heard sometimes touch her manner feebly, in the famous triumph of her hilarity, 'Push about the Jorum.' But some conception of her brilliant impetuous style may be formed by those who have been so happy as to hear Ambrogetti sing the not less famous 'Fin ch'an dal vino,' in the masterwork of Mozart, *Don Giovanni*. Voice he had little, but he had articulation and rapidity, that seldom are found together—his close shake before returning upon the subject, and seeming ease, though so exhausted as he must have been, all remind me of his predecessor of a different school, nation, and sex; and Catley, if at all conceivable by the present age, will be only found in Ambrogetti.

I would not be misconceived to intend any preference of the singers of a former day over the present vocalists. The style of our music is changed: our composers of the day rival their Italian or German brethren in all the intricacies of the science. What the Germans have done for letters they have done for music also—they have matured the nursery, and written seriously of hobgoblins—the stage accordingly teems with hellish fiends, and their music imitates the wild actions of perverted beings. Composition has dispensed with all subject, and airs seem constructed of a series of unconnected flights, lengthened into absurdity by a cadence of chromatic divisions, ending with a vaulting of no meaning, and an abrupt descent upon the key note. The singer, however, makes his exit in triumph, and fortunes are made by the music and the execution of it. Our ears are, as it were, punished for their pains; we are disgraced while we are rivetted to the spot. Yet powerful nature sometimes throws off the mountains of absurdity heaped upon her, and in some pathetic or rustic strain by Stephens or Tree, Braham (though rare) or Sinclair, asserts her right to the simple endowments of her youth. The force of fashion, the appetite for novelty, the silly aspiration to resemble the nations on the Continent soon, however, carry us into the rage, whatever it be, and we have recently been almost in doubt whether Mozart himself must not fall before the 'free shot' of Carl Maria Von Weber. Amidst extravagance poor common sense, like Cordelia in *King Lear*, indulges its hearted genuine affection and is silent.

The Haymarket Theatre, now the property of Mr. Colman, opened on the 30th of May, and Foote acted his usual characters in the *Nabob* and the *Devil on Two Sticks*. But the new manager had made very great efforts to secure a company of sterling merit. Miss Barsanti had returned from Ireland much improved. Miss Farren, with very high provincial reputation, bore her name at once into the bills of the day, and acted Miss Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer* on the 9th of June. She was even then greatly admired, and it was obvious that her lovely expression, her intelligence, and the air of fashion about her would, at no very distant period, place her in the seat of Mrs. Abington,

whenever she should retire. Here, therefore, the little manager possessed himself of a treasure essential to the style of his summer amusement, an actress able to divide the palm of genteel comedy with the elder Palmer. After the comedy, Edwin, in Midas, convulsed the house with laughter as usual. Perhaps Edwin, like Liston, never was fully enjoyed except in a small theatre.

Two nights after Miss Farren's first appearance—long desired and amply gratifying expectation—Henderson performed in London, after being for some seasons the Roscius of Bath. I have recently perused his correspondence on the subject of engaging with Mr. Garrick. One or two trial parts, and then coming under the management of that great actor, to do whatever should be assigned, would certainly have ruined him. It for a time did ruin Mrs. Siddons, who, like himself, was too precious for 'nature's sale work,' and could only be worthy attention in the highest place. Henderson came to Colman's on this stipulation; he arrived as another Jubilee for Shakespeare, and the poet lived in the actor in the plenitude of both his serious and his comic power. Henderson, I think, wisely took Shylock for the opening part. Macklin, during the preceding winter, had often performed it at Covent Garden. But the conception of Henderson was quite original. He could be, when he chose it, the most accurate of mimics; but, as he told me, it cost him infinite trouble to lay aside the hold that Garrick's manner had taken of him. Macklin he probably had seen, for I reckon the story of the veteran's remark to be one of those pure fictions which are made because they are pointed sentences, and believed because they are probable. Had Henderson seen Macklin, he could not but differ from him. In taste, in feeling, in accurate reading, as well as the superior vigour of his frame, he must have exhibited the greatest distinction. His scene with Tubal was perfectly astonishing. He set out in the play with a reading which I should recommend for effect to the actor but carefully keep from the text of Shakespeare. The reader remembers the Jew's address to Antonio:

> 'Signor Antonio, many a time and oft,
> On the Rialto you have rated me
> About my monies, and my usances.'

The compound adverb 'many-a-time-and-oft' is one of those clustered pleonasms which have passed unquestioned into common speech; absurd enough, like the aldermanic toast, 'a speedy peace and soon'; but it was the phraseology of Shakespeare, and should never be suspected of corruption. Henderson divided it for the sake of strengthening his impression, 'Many a time,'—(as if he had implied many *places*;)—'and oft on the Rialto!' (the place where merchants most do congregate, and therefore that where his vituperation would be most injurious;) 'you have rated me.' I persuade myself that Shakespeare, with our present feeling of the value of character upon the Royal Exchange, would have thanked an actor for a discrimination so emphatic and judicious. From the first Henderson became a school, in which the young student might learn to think, and to feel also, if nature had endowed him with the requisite sensibility. By sensibility I do not mean that childish affection which the general notion of distress of any kind sometimes compels a performer to display, to the palpable injury of his own art; but that quick feeling at the hour of study, which sympathises with the character he develops, and is a sure guide to the mimic emotions, as to their place, their kind, and their duration. A great actor on the scene displays all this, not because he must be moved, but because he ought to seem so; not because he cannot restrain emotion, but because he commands it. The whole then is deception, and his art would be imperfect if all his feelings were not under absolute control. Henderson frequently repeated his Shylock, and Miss Barsanti was the Portia through the season.

But Shylock, however animated, called upon Henderson for a small portion of his great talents, and he followed that character by Hamlet, in which he made an impression of still greater value. We have been gradually taking away from Shakespeare much that is characteristic of him and of nature. I mean the mixture of gay and comic images with tragic character; by omitting which the latter is rendered false as the representative of humanity, and the prodigy of unvaried woe is demanded on the stage, though it probably never existed in any considerable portion of life, even passed in a prison. We know that Cervantes wrote the first part

of *Don Quixote* in a state of poverty and confinement. Now here is an assemblage of ludicrous images which a carnival of wealth and pleasure never could collect together. It induced a King of Spain to say, looking from his palace upon a man who was laughing immoderately, 'that man is either mad, or he is reading *Don Quixote*.' History records the pleasantries of men, and women also, upon the scaffold; they jest upon their own persons, and those of their attendants; the axe itself is not sharper than their wit, and yet, on the stage, the jest of a gravedigger devotes a nation to barbarism. Such delicacy first retrenches all pleasantry from the tragic character, and the '*qualis ab incepto*,' wrongly considered, has banished much of nature on seemingly classic authority. Horace means only that a character should be consistent. He laughed, as we do, at fifth act conversions—where the parsimonious become profuse, and the jealous free and open—where hatred suddenly purifies its sullen habitation, and catastrophe becomes but another term for miracle. The actor in degree follows this absurd and narrow principle; and if he is to act in tragedy, thinks only how its dignity and its pathos are to be displayed and enforced. He leans, therefore, too much to the exclusive and the unnatural, and by degrees becomes an unfit representative of characters drawn with the freedom of Shakespeare's; and it is unquestionably true that, without a considerable feeling of comedy, tragedy itself will be imperfectly represented. This was the opinion of Mr. Garrick; and Henderson held it as an important principle of his art,—and in his Hamlet there were gleams of gentlemanly gaiety, that sat upon his general gloom, as the bright border of the sunbeam upon a watery cloud. George Steevens asserted two things of Henderson's Hamlet,—that in the instructions to the players he had less of the magister than Garrick, was more princely and at his ease; and that in the soliloquy upon death he reasoned better, and left a deeper impression of its solemn efficacy. I can only bring my recollection strongly to bear upon Henderson; I now attended him with a delight for which I know no equivalent terms; and to him I probably owe much of the devotion of my mind to Shakespeare.

The opinions of Mr. Steevens were sometimes coloured by his prejudices, and he had always a wish to lower the pride of Garrick. He felt something in the way of Johnson as to the inferior rewards of literature; and seemed to repine at the adulation which followed the ministers of the drama. He laboured to turn the Jubilee at Stratford into ridicule, and, I have no doubt, enjoyed the rain that abridged the proud pageantry invented by Garrick. Yet in the preferences just given I know him to have been sincere: he mentioned them as exceptions to a very detailed admiration of Garrick's excellencies; and the power of Henderson in soliloquy was peculiar, and I think unequalled in my time. He did not, in order to avoid the audience, keep back upon the stage, or present less than his front to the house; all tricks to avoid the danger of uttering his thoughts to others—he stood in front, and reasoned over the pit, not to it. Thus it was in those masterly developments of Hamlet; and so he gave also the perhaps still more brilliant soliloquies of Falstaff—upon his ragged regiment,—and upon that unsurgical word honour.

However, not to anticipate, Mr. Henderson followed his Hamlet on the 26th of June, by Leon, in *Rule a Wife*, on the 15th of July. Here he let out much of his comic vein, preparatory to the full tide of pleasantry which burst upon the town in his Falstaff, in the first part of *Henry the Fourth*, nine days after. Then it was that Palmer, in the Prince of Wales, studied the humours of his companion, so as years afterwards to supply the best consolation for his loss. Will the reader indulge me in a slight reference to myself on this occasion? Surrounded now by all the editions of our great poet, I had then nothing better than Rowe's careless republication in 1709, had never seen Falstaff upon the stage, and had nothing to aid my youthful imagination but a few, perhaps vague, recollections of Quin, and Love, and Shuter, which an old friend of our family sometimes did his best to embody for me. I read my Shakespeare, and, I confess, doubted the interpretation of those great commentators of the character. Whatever they had preserved, resolved itself into the braggart and the drunkard, and I saw no attempt to mark a mind fertile

beyond parallel in wit, and even oppressed by the tumultuary images of humour that crowded uncontrollably into his fancy. I saw Mr. Henderson, and saw without shame how far he had exceeded all that I could suspect to be warranted by Shakespeare. He stands before me with the muster of his recruits legible in his eye, and I hear the fat and chuffy tones by which he added humour to the ludicrous terms of the poet's description. 'Such as fear the report of a caliver, worse than a struck fowl, or a *hurt wild duck*.' 'Such *toasts and butter*.' 'Gentlemen of *companies*.' 'Slaves as ragged as *Lazarus* in the *painted cloth*.' 'A hundred and fifty *tatter'd prodigals*, lately come from *swine-keeping*—from eating *draff and husks*.' 'Unloaded the *gibbets*, and *press'd* the *dead bodies*.' 'There 's but a shirt and a-*half* (O that half!) in all my company: and the half shirt is *two napkins tack'd* together, and thrown over the shoulders, like a *herald's coat*, without *sleeves*.' The bursts of laughter he excited by this, which he did not hurry, but seemed mentally to enjoy, as the images rose in succession, were beyond measure delightful. He made his audience for the time as intelligent as himself, and a syllable of pleasure was not lost upon them.

This was in truth a proud season for Henderson. His other characters were Richard the Third—Don John, in *The Chances*—Bayes, in *The Rehearsal*—and Falstaff, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. He had the honour to close the season, on the 15th of September, in Hamlet, as the great magnet, though I have not yet enumerated half the rival attraction. Foote continued to act some of his old favourites—Smirke and Mrs. Cole in *The Minor*—Cadwallader in *The Author*. Miss Farren had wisely performed Maria in *The Citizen*; but as to Rosetta, in *Love in a Village*, it was not in the metropolis that she should have trespassed musically beyond a single song, 'Ramonnez ci, ramonnez là,' or such another pretty trifle, as an accomplishment merely. She was duly appreciated, however, by Colman, who entrusted to her and Palmer his grand card, *The Spanish Barber*; upon which he had laboured very successfully, and rightly anticipated would be a durable attraction to his theatre.

This season, at the Haymarket, was the most remarkable that stands upon record. Colman, however, failed in

one point of his management. He revived Gay's opera of *Polly*, on the strength of Dubellamy, and a young lady, a Mrs. Colles; but its original insipidity allowed it, after a dozen nights, to drop once more, perhaps for ever, into oblivion. It seemed to be acted for the sole benefit of Gay's old patroness, the Duchess of Queensbury, who attended the representation frequently, and gratified her age by reviving the feelings of her former friendship. I hope that she was so happily deluded as never to doubt for a moment the excellence of the opera, and that her poet maintained his post of honour to the last. It was an early subject of my remark, that much deference was paid, and cheerfully, almost proudly paid, to those venerable persons who among ourselves had enjoyed the society of Pope, or mixed at all in the circles which he frequented. The honours of genius are seemingly shared where they are felt, and we become greater by a just admiration. On the Continent it was a proud distinction to have seen and conversed either with Voltaire or Rousseau.

Notwithstanding the attraction of Henderson, the manager had engaged Digges to act at the 'little theatre,' and on the 14th of August he made his first appearance in London, in the character of Cato. A modern must smile at the notion of Cato in council, dressed exactly like Sir Roger de Coverley, as chairman of a bench of justices; but at this time costume had hardly touched us with the desire for accuracy—if the dress was not modern, and the actor looked venerable, enough was done for the exterior of Cato; the wig occasionally required a renewal of its powder from the vehemence of the orator. Even my friend Kemble, when he first acted the great patriot in town, appeared in exactly the same garb as Digges.

The tragedian of the North was an actor, however harsh and peculiar, of great value, and perhaps in him might survive something of the stern manly manner of the old school. He was not greatly followed here, and in this season only added to Cato, his Wolsey in *Henry the Eighth*, a masterly performance, and his Sir John Brute, in *The Provoked Wife*. Mr. Colman, I should imagine, saw that he had done wisely to remove himself from Covent Garden and rival partners to a narrower sphere and undisputed control.

CHAPTER V

AT the commencement of the Drury Lane season of 1777-8, Miss Priscilla Hopkins gave her hand in marriage to Mr. Brereton. This lady by her second nuptials contributed not only to the domestic comfort so valuable to a man like Kemble, but, intimately blended with his fortune and his fame, became a model how the most arduous duties of life should be discharged.

On the 2nd of October, a very lovely and entertaining singer and actress, Miss Walpole, made her first appearance, under the new managers, in the character of Rosetta. She became a great favourite with the public. Her figure was finely formed, and subsequently, in Sheridan's afterpiece of *The Camp*, Miss Walpole's accomplishments might possibly increase the military mania of the country.

A theatre is seldom anxious for more than poetical justice, but men catch the tone of their neighbourhood, and the criticism of Bow Street made an attempt at Covent Garden to reform the *Beggar's Opera*. On the 17th of October, Macheath's destiny was differently arranged upon the stage: and, instead of being blest in the arms of the tender Polly, he was sentenced to the lighters, to obtain ballast for so unsteady a character.

But in what terms am I to notice the next theatrical event? On the 20th of the month, Samuel Foote expired at the Ship Inn, Dover, in only the fifty-fifth year of his age. He had disposed of his theatre to Colman, and meditated a tour upon the Continent for the recovery of his health, and even the tranquillity of his mind, considerably impaired by the attacks of an infamous woman. There is

an accusation so foul, that it injures where it cannot attach, and to have been suspected is almost fatal. The villainy of these times, or the baseness of Kenrick and the Duchess of K., launched this pestilence at the heads of both Garrick and Foote.

In our present state of calm enjoyment of the wit of one, and the science of the other—for Garrick reformed the stage, and will be felt for ever in the nature which he restored to the actor—it is hardly to be credited that Kenrick, a scholar, honoured with academic degrees, should have dared to insult his country in the foul pursuit of his revenge at some managerial decision of Garrick. To the disgrace of that country itself, the fifth edition now lies before me of his wretched parody of Virgil's 9th Eclogue, '*Quo te, Moeri, pedes?*' which he calls *Love in the Suds*, or, the Lamentation of Roscius for the Loss of his Nyky, printed for Wheble in the year 1772. The impudence of Kenrick has never been exceeded. He dedicates his polluted mess to Garrick himself, and warns him against an indiscreet application of what does not concern him. Yet his very first page exhibits the following line, with the accompanying note to it,

'Whither away now, George, into the city?'[1]

But I will revive the perishing infamy of this man. Thus he pointedly answers three queries, put to him publicly with the signature of candour :—

'I did not mean to throw out the most scandalous insinuations on the character of Roscius, nor any insinuation more scandalous than his conduct.

'Calumny I detest, but I think vice should be exposed to infamy; nor have I so much false delicacy as to conceive it should be treated with tenderness in proportion as it is abominable.

'I have not acknowledged that I entertain a very *different* opinion of Roscius; on the contrary, I declare that I entertain a very *indifferent* opinion of him.'

[1] 'The brother and constant companion of Roscius; the Mercury of our theatrical Jupiter, whom he dispatches with his divine commands to mortal poets and miserable actors.'

Kenrick is not badly characterised by the following epigram, written by himself to his own honour:

> 'The wits who drink water, and suck sugar-candy,
> Impute the strong spirit of Kenrick to brandy.
> They are not so much out; the matter in short is,
> He sips *aqua-vitæ*, and spits *aqua-fortis*.'

However, Garrick very properly moved the Court of King's Bench, in the person of the famous Dunning, for leave to file an information for the libel, and retained Wallace, Dunning, Mansfield, and Murphy.

Foote, I have been told, did not conduct himself with the fortitude that became so great a man, and was melted into tears by the declaration of his innocence. But it is wrong to assume the possession of great mental firmness from the unrestrained sallies of satire, and the desperate imprudence of wit. I have frequently been astonished at such retrocessions of spirit. It will be a source of constant regret to me that I never enjoyed the conversation talents of Foote; a reverend friend of mine felt himself, to use his own strong expression, in a state of 'intellectual rapture,' and I once hoped that he might preserve by writing some record of the 'delight which quite bewildered him.' But I fear the period for any exertion with the pen is past.

Murphy sadly disappointed the world by his *Life of Garrick*, which in fact, however difficult such a process must have been, sunk below the level of Tom Davies. He promised us a life of Foote, and I for one did suppose that he might have made collections for it, during their long and close intimacy; but I do not think he really had much anecdote in his stores; and, when I used to meet him, his collection was very scanty and too frequently repeated. Murphy never gave his life of Foote. When he died, however, we had a slight, a very slight compensation, in Foote's *Life of Murphy*. Foote's name, like that of Selwyn, or Quin, or Jekyl, is the synonym of humour; and frequently appropriates the invention of another brain. I cannot course him through the Encyclopedia of Wit.

I stop to give one instance of the readiness of his wit, which I do not fancy to be common. Foote was to dine in the country, and the whole of the party was assembled,

with the exception of a whimsical gentleman, who wore a black scratch wig :—at length the company, looking out, saw somebody in motion down a fine avenue of trees; but a dispute arose at the windows, whether it was their friend. 'It is certainly he or Charles the Second,' said Foote, 'for I see a black wig bobbing up and down among the *oaks*.'

I am quite ignorant how far mental uneasiness may contribute to such a disease as palsy. Foote had one attack of it upon the stage, during the last season of his public appearance. His impressions upon quitting town were gloomy; he was haunted by presentiments of his own end. He contemplated his fine collection of dramatic portraits, and, stopping some time before that of Weston, uttered an exclamation of foreboding tenderness. At Dover he had a second attack of paralysis, and lingered only a few hours. His body was brought to town and privately interred in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey. But Mr. William Jewell, so many years treasurer of the 'little theatre,' devoted a friendly tablet to his memory in the Church of St. Mary at Dover. Poor Jewell should, however, have entrusted the inscription upon it to any taste but his own; for, though it may be as creditable to Foote as to Prince Harry

> 'To have a tear for pity, and a hand
> Open as day to melting charity,'–

yet these excellencies, I willingly think, he but shared with the greater part of the theatrical community; and his genius merited a distinct and ample commemoration. The best, because most gentlemanly, portrait of him is a head, life size, in crayons, full of intelligence;—seemingly as he dressed when to mingle in that high society which he frequented, without the smallest sacrifice of his independence, and delighted beyond any chance of competition. This picture was in the possession of Jewell, and I do not think it has ever been engraven, or, if it have, so indifferently as to bar discovery.

Murphy was not yet become insensible to the fame of tragedy; and he secured, by a few alterations and additions, another theatre and a somewhat different audience to his *Orphan of China*, which was acted at Covent Garden on

the 6th of November 1777. I honour this gentleman assuredly upon many accounts; but for nothing more than the manly expostulation which he addressed to Voltaire on the first appearance of this tragedy, in the year 1759. In reference to the rival play *L'Orphelin de la Chine*, he dared to say to the author that, though he had worked up his first act and the beginning of his second like a poet indeed, his exertion then slackened, or rather gave way all at once —the tumult of the passions was over, Gengiskan talked politics—the strong impulses of maternal affection are lowered into cold unimpassioned narrative—and even the Tartar conqueror becomes Le Chevalier Gengiskan, and sighs as true lover-like sentiment as ever breathed in the fantastic gardens of the Tuilleries. He reminds him of his own criticism upon Corneille, and shows that what he condemns in Theseus can never be endured in Gengiskan.[1]

Unlike Horace Walpole, whom his dear blind woman, Madame du Deffand, ensnared into a very submissive retreat from the controversy he had even provoked with Voltaire, Murphy with infinite delicacy reminds him of his own compliment to Metastasio—'Ah! le cher voleur! il m'a bien embelli'—and then proceeds to track the French poet in his own plunder of Shakespeare. He reproaches him with his injustice to the great Islander, and affirms his sentence of disingenuousness and ingratitude by the authority of an excellent critic, who had observed 'that wherever in his *avant-propos* he has spoken in degrading terms of the great English Bard, it may be deemed a sure prognostic that his play was the better for him!' All this, too, seasoned by a just tribute to Voltaire's genius, which, at whatever distance, the writer is ambitious to imitate.

[1] Voltaire is, however, felt to have influenced the dialogue of Murphy; and we detect the imitator sometimes by an uncouth and scientific term.

MURPHY.

'The iron swarm
Of *Hyperboreans* troop along the streets,
Reeking from slaughter.'

VOLTAIRE.

'J'ai vu de ces brigands la horde *hyperborée*
Par des fleuves de sang se frayant une entrée.'

It may be proper to observe with reference to Voltaire's play, which appeared four years before Murphy's, that the latter portion of it had been weakly conceived at first; and he condemned himself to the *amende honorable* of re-writing the whole of the fourth and fifth acts. But original deficiency of interest is rarely supplied by such afterthoughts. At the time when that singular man was correcting the great Tartar, he was also employed upon his General History and other works, so as to occupy a number of copyists. In addition to all which he was alarmed almost to insanity by the escape of his *Pucelle d'Orléans*, indiscreetly trusted to a female friend, which a fellow of the name of Grasset had grossly interpolated, and offered even to himself for sale. However, this might only be a pilot balloon before the grand machine to ascertain the *aura popularis*, and the reception of his most splendid folly. His efforts to interest the King's mistress, Madame de Pompadour, are quite amusing. In the midst of this mass of occupations he received Rousseau's *Essai sur l'Inégalité des Conditions*—the reader may smile at the pleasantries by which he reproves an insane philosopher. 'I have received,' he says, 'your new book against the human race. You will give pleasure by the truths you tell, but you will not correct mankind. So much wit was never before employed in the desire to render us beasts. One feels anxious to go upon all fours when reading your work. However, as I have lost the habit these sixty years, I feel unhappily that it is impossible for me to recover it, and I leave that natural temptation to those more worthy of it than you and myself.'

To be brought by any accident to speak of such men is an *allure naturelle* (Voltaire's expression) which it is impossible for me to resist; and a book whose object is entertainment alone may permit, if it do not authorise, allusions so very miscellaneous.

Before I entirely resign Murphy's *Orphan of China* to the oblivion which I fear is its settled lot, I think myself bound to repeat his acknowledgments to two of his performers, Mrs. Yates and Mr. Garrick. 'You would have beheld, M. de Voltaire, in Mandane, a figure that would adorn

any stage in Europe, and you would have acknowledged that her acting promises to equal the elegance of her person: moreover, you would have seen a Zanti whose exquisite powers are capable of adding pathos and harmony even to our great Shakespeare'; and then, with an address equal to that of Voltaire himself, and for which Garrick should have been bound to him for ever, 'let me add, Sir, that the genius of this performer has been in Mahomet, in Merope, and Zara, the chief support of your own scenes upon the English stage.'

As Mr. Harris most unquestionably could not do even tolerable justice by his actors to this revival, I must presume him to have been caught by the *Orphan*, merely because he was a native of China; and that his taste for spectacle revelled in the splendid assemblages of foreign dress presented by the original inhabitants, and their more warlike, perhaps more picturesque, invaders.

The next production at this theatre was an original tragedy by Miss Moore, called *Percy*, which, though wanting the true masculine nerve, will, from a kind of hereditary feeling, always interest those whose infancy is taught even to lisp the strong antipathies between the Percy and the Douglas.

Many years have passed away since I read this tragedy. I have already, too sportively perhaps, commemorated the style in which the hero of Northumberland was acted by Lewis. The Douglas of Wroughton had a great deal of the feudal spirit. Miss Moore received the hint, and more than the hint, of her play from the romantic story of Raoul, Sire de Coucy, who flourished in the reign of Philippe Auguste, towards the end of the 12th century. This *preux chevalier* adorned the bravery common to his age with softer and more ingenuous accomplishments—his love was equal to his courage, and his muse became the faithful and not inelegant interpreter of his passion. That, however, was unfortunate—the object of his affection was the lady of a chieftain named De Fajel.

In the year 1191, De Coucy, after greatly distinguishing himself, died at the siege of Acre. A few days before his death he wrote tenderly to the sovereign of his affections,

and charged his faithful squire to bear literally his heart along with his epistle. The messenger selected for the conveyance of this text and glossary, was so unfortunate as to be seized by the Sieur de Fajel himself, who was but too well read in such mysteries; and conceived a savage and unnatural revenge. I will not inquire into the comparative cookery of that gallant period, a subject which merits the learned inquiry of Dr. Kitchener himself; but De Fajel conveyed a portion of his rival's heart into some dish served up to his wife, and informed her of the sort of food of which she had unconsciously partaken.[1] The unhappy woman did not struggle to endure the inhuman indignity, but, totally overwhelmed in grief, steadily refused every succeeding nourishment, and died in a short time of exhaustion and horror.

It is unnecessary to point out how much the well-known tragedy of *Percy* has partaken of the romantic adventures of Raoul de Coucy.

At the other theatre, William Shirley, a gentleman more accomplished perhaps as a merchant than a poet, on the credit of his *Edward the Black Prince*, brought out a tragedy called the *Roman Sacrifice*, which was but coldly received, and lived only through four nights. As it never received in its season the honours of the press, I know nothing of it; but am inclined to think it rather insipid, since the Black Prince himself failed to inspire its author.

There have been men distinguished by a single speech, and some by a single play. Home really should have disclaimed every dramatic work but *Douglas*; and ought to have been wiser than, in 1778, to trust his tragedy of *Alfred* upon the stage. It was acted but three times, and is happily for his fame forgotten. Voltaire once whimsically attributed to Home his own comedy called *L'Ecossaise*, of which

[1] 'There may be in the cup
A spider steep'd, and one may drink, depart,
And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge
Is not infected: but if one present
The abhorr'd ingredient to his eye, make known
How he hath drank, he cracks his gorge, his sides,
With violent hefts: I have drank, and seen the spider.'
Winter's Tale, Act 2, Sc. 1.

he affected to give a translation under the name of Jerome Carré. The chief object of this piece was the immolation of his great enemy Fréron, with the slight nominal change of Frélon [1] (wasp). But the end of such creatures is as obvious as their origin or the course of their existence—

> 'So morning insects, that in muck begun,
> Shine, buzz, and fly-blow in the setting sun.'

Voltaire should have been superior to the notice of so contemptible an enemy. As to *L'Ecossaise*, Home could only, as they say, claim the kindred of country; the humour, the delicacy, the interest were equally above the Scotch tragedian, and even the philosopher, though undoubtedly one of the first of men.

Colman, however, really adopted *L'Ecossaise* in English, and dedicated his *Merchant Freeport* to Voltaire. The acknowledgment of the Patriarch of Ferney it would be cruel to withhold, though, alas! who can translate the neatness of Voltaire?

'Sir,—Were I able to use my own hand, I would take the liberty to thank you in English for the present of your charming comedies; and were I young, I would come to see them acted in London.

'You have infinitely embellished *L'Ecossaise*, exhibited under the name of Freeport, in fact, the best character in the piece. You have done also what I did not dare to do, you punish your Fréron (Spatter) at the end of the comedy. I was unwilling to allow this rascal a longer appearance

[1] Fréron was a journalist, who persecuted Voltaire through much of his literary career. He might at times fasten upon mistake, but his great delight was to calumniate his motives. I neither suppose nor assert the character to be peculiar to Paris, and some unhappy scribblers may even sell their spleen in London; but the following *vivâ voce* exposition by Frélon, of his own merits, exceeds all my experience of the English reptile.

'Si vous avez quelque ami à qui vous vouliez donner des éloges, ou quelque ennemi dont on doive dire du mal, quelque auteur a protéger ou à décrier, il n'en coûte qu'une pistole par paragraphe.'—*L'Ecossaise*, Act 1, Sc. 2.

I object to the rate of exchange, though large sums have, I know, been given, or lent, upon such occasions.

upon the stage—but you are a better sheriff than I am, and are right to see justice done.

'When I amused myself in composing that little piece for my theatre at Ferney, our company, actors and actresses, besought me to bring Fréron upon the stage, as a character absolutely original. I did not know him, had never even seen him, but I am told my portrait is the most exact of resemblances.

'When the piece was acted at Paris, this reptile was present the first night. He was recognised at the very outset, and saluted with clapping of hands, hootings, and revilings from every quarter; at the end of the play, the whole audience escorted him from the theatre with shouts of laughter. He has had the happiness to be acted and ridiculed on every stage in Europe, from Petersburg to Brussels. It is sometimes advisable to sweep away these spiders from the Temple of the Muses. I think you have also your Frérons in London; they are not quite so wretched as ours. During the conference at Poissy, a good Catholic wrote thus to as good a Protestant: "Sir, matters are quite equal on both sides; it is true the learned with you are more learned than the learned with us—but in recompense, our ignorant are infinitely more ignorant than yours."

'Continue, Sir, to enrich the public with your delightful productions. I have the honour to be with due esteem, etc.

'VOLTAIRE.

'To George Colman, Esq.

'Dated 14th November, 1768.'

Home and Hume were relations—the spelling of the name in Scotland has always so fluctuated. The *Journal Encyclopédique* of April, 1758, thus amiably discriminates those authors: 'L'auteur de *Douglas* est le ministre Hume (Home), parent du fameux David Hume, si célèbre par son impiété.' His present most Christian Majesty Charles x. has thus spoken of Voltaire, 'C'etait un garçon d'esprit! (un garçon!) mais cet homme-là a fait bien du mal—il a bouleversé toutes les idées reçues.' I must not, on the other side, withhold the slender consolation afforded to the memories of such men by the following pointed sentence

from the great Sovereign of Prussia: 'Donner,' says he, 'des marques d'estime à cet admirable auteur était en quelque façon honorer notre siècle.' To justify our esteem for so admirable an author, is in some way to do honour to the age we live in.

Mr. Cumberland, 'the Terence of England, the mender of hearts,' had been, since the production of his *West Indian*, disinclined to the severer Muse, or prohibited from making to it any public offering, or, as it might be, sacrifice. He had endeavoured to weave somewhat of female interest into Shakespeare's *Timon*; but it may be supposed with indifferent success, and certainly not by the choice even of the best among the presented means in the play.

I ought at all hazards to undergo the peril of naming what I think the best. Lucilius, a gentleman of Timon's, is in love with the daughter of an old Athenian, who returns his affection—but their fortunes are disproportionate, and the father threatens, if she marry without his consent, that he will choose

> 'His heir from forth the beggars of the world,
> And dispossess her all.'

Timon immediately rears up the fortune of Lucilius to that of his mistress; and it is on the gratitude of her gentle bosom that I would found the attempt, at least, to soften the 'dangerous nature' of Timon. Such a character would class with the Bellario, perhaps, of *Philaster*; and somewhat approach the Imogen of Shakespeare; but though I might preserve the same male disguise, the grateful principle, which must be the soul of the part, would sufficiently discriminate Lucilia from her two gentle but powerful rivals.

The truth is, that Shakespeare had completed his own grand and terrible monodrame; and the gentler emotions only disturbed and weakened the savage misanthropy that reigned in measure fully equal to the former exhausted prodigality. But sacrifices have, in other cases equally strong, been made to the necessity of securing an audience (in Lear for instance); and the hope of maintaining a great Timon upon the scene might be as much justification as an audience, and more than a manager, would require.

But the additions should at all events have been in the character of the play, and by no means have reminded Sheridan, and more than a rival wit, of 'the mimicry of Falstaff's page.'

The arrival of Henderson in London offered to Cumberland the aid of one accomplished tragedian; and he carried along with him to Drury Lane Theatre the historical play of the *Battle of Hastings*; an unfortunate subject, for who loves to be reminded of the absolute and oppressive conquest of his country?

Mr. Cumberland has availed himself of even the liberty of the novelist in varying character and supplying events. The simple Edgar Atheling became an heroic personage; and Harold, who had flown from the expulsion of the Norwegians in the eastern parts of his kingdom, to combat the yet more formidable Normans in the southern, is equally misrepresented. The falsification of history by the modern bard serves but the object of a night, and is little known in the theatre, and not at all beyond it. The heresies of Shakespeare in his dramatic histories (for he discriminates them from tragedies) proceed from the chronicles which he copied, the only history known to his age; and the worshippers of Richard the Third, from Buck to Walpole, have only to regret that he was unhappily born too early to receive them for his guides, instead of the Lancastrian writers, who it seems so foully calumniated that 'meek usurper.'

One thing was certainly decided on this occasion, though it was not that battle which gave name to the play—it was that Henderson's person was essentially unheroic. I notice with some doubt that his very declamation, however suited to our elder dramatists, from its freedom and variety, seemed unallied to language written by a modern. Certainly it was in full contrast to the style of every other performer in the play. I hardly dare pronounce upon the question; though I fear the effort to communicate the natural to the artificial, while it takes the stiffness out of the verse, but leaves it to the positive feebleness of its meaning; and the effect upon the ear, in consequence, is as flat as the appeal to the understanding or the passions. He who reads

with attention the elaborated dialogue, for instance, of Dr. Johnson's *Irene* (I would quote still more artificial structure did I know where it was to be found) must, I think, perceive that much of its effect resides in the choice of the measured magnificence of the old school of orators. Whether the modern bard do or do not possess the '*mens divinior*,' he must be declaimed by the '*os magna sonaturum*,' or his efficacy with his contemporaries is very slight indeed. It may be said—'relieve the actor from the necessity of being unnatural, by writing as your fathers have written'—and it is a pity that the recommendation, while it suggests the remedy, does not supply the means.

It may be, perhaps, of little moment to notice the death of William Havard, on the 28th of January, 1778. He was a worthy, unobtrusive, harmless man, one of the objects of Garrick's talent for mimicry, and that is all: but at Paris the profession sustained a loss which, in the judgment of the best French critics, has never been repaired, the death of the great tragedian Le Kain, on the 8th of February. He had long sustained the credit of the Théâtre Français, and was the only remaining artist who had been formed in the true school. Le Kain was an example that there are no barriers insurmountable to genius. His tenderness of soul rendered the coarsest features beautiful, his ardour converted a very plebeian figure into the just representative of the hero. He did not neglect the aids of costume, and by incessant application corrected the early imperfections of his voice. He acted a favourite character, Vendome, with so much effort as to bring on an inflammatory complaint, which carried him off in a fortnight. But he did not perish as the lover of Adelaide, nor come by his death in 'a fiction, in a dream of passion,' if we are to credit the gossip of the Parisians. That ingenious people attributed their loss to his unbounded attachment to a Madame Benoît, for 'whose dear sake,' it appears, he had acted Vendome in a manner so prodigiously effective.

The famous *bon mot* of Le Kain cannot be too often repeated, until the feeling it reproved be entirely done away. To an officer, who in his presence used very contemptuous language, while contrasting with the splendid fortune

acquired by an actor the condition of a soldier, reduced, after long and important services, to exist upon a miserable pension—no other advantage: 'What then, Sir, do you think it nothing to be supposed entitled to the right of talking to me in this manner?' The privileges of honour are not to be estimated by money; and he must be unworthy of such distinction who can measure it against opulence sordidly acquired. In the case before us there is much more to be said. The art practised is certainly liberal, and in its perfection of as rare occurrence as the appearance of any other natural phenomenon. Genius is a comet, except in one material point—it displays its amazing brightness, excites our gaze and wonder, and is often erratic in its course;—but who, at its departure, can calculate its return? Le Kain had acted before Voltaire at his own private theatre, and indeed that great writer had taken unusual pains in preparing the actor to be the medium of his own glory; yet he never was so happy as to behold his pupil upon the stage of Paris. It was a few days after Voltaire quitted France for Prussia, that Le Kain was permitted to make his *début* at the Théâtre Français, and he died just before Voltaire's return to the capital, after an absence of twenty-seven years. The philosopher had long outlived his dramatic genius, and survived even its representative.

It may be worthy of a slight digression to consider the very peculiar essence, if I may so express myself, of dramatic power. Every other property of a great mind may remain; the keenness of application, the strength of reasoning, the grammatical science of language, the brilliancy of wit, the smartness of repartee, the utmost refinement of taste. We inquire for the writer of *Alzire*, and *Mahomet*, and *Zaïre*, and we find him sunken to the author of *Irene*. Yet his imagination was full of his youngest offering to Melpomene; and on his arrival in Paris, after a fatiguing journey of five days, in the month of February, and in the eighty-fourth year of his age, he passed the whole of the night in correcting the two latter acts of his tragedy. When Madame Vestris, who had undertaken his Irene, visited him in the morning—the old gentleman with amazing neatness thus addressed her—'J'ai été occupé

de vous, Madame, toute la nuit comme si je n'avais que vingt ans.' Ah, Madam, I have been occupied with you the whole of the night, as if I were but twenty. The empire of the passions is the region of tragedy—it is essential not only to think but feel. Can we not then conceive the full power of our own Shakespeare at eighty-four? I answer at once, 'without a miracle, I for one cannot conceive it.'

I will not refuse myself the pleasure of noticing the appearance of a burletta which has frequently amused me; *Poor Vulcan*, written by Dibdin. Quick here made a very whimsical and lasting impression. The music was light and gay, as the nature of the composition required. But whatever musical science was to gain from either Dibdin or Shield, it now sustained a loss, which nearly half a century has certainly not repaired, in the death of that great man, Dr. Arne, on the 5th of March 1778.

The doctor's father was the famous political upholsterer immortalised by Mr. Addison in the 155th number of the *Tatler*. He neglected his proper business in Covent Garden to encumber the seats of the Park, and amuse idlers like himself with political discussion. This was the man who is painted by the English La Bruyère as 'encumbered on a sultry day with a loose greatcoat and a muff,[1] with a long campaign wig out of curl, and farther adorned by a pair of black garters buckled under the knee.' It is curious, at all times, to learn the shifts of poverty to look important; and to observe the vigilance of remark, as to dress, by which a spectre so troublesome as penury is to be known and avoided. He is represented as closing his tedious harangues by a usual importunity for the loan of half-a-crown. Addison, whose munificence, at least upon paper, was never questioned, adds on this request, 'In compassion to so needy a statesman, and to dissipate the

[1] The last male whom I remember to have seen encumbered, or comforted, by this unusual article of dress, was the father of the present Earl of Liverpool. I saw him sitting in the House of Peers, with a small hand-muff reposing on his knees, such as Lord Oxford used to purchase for his friends at some fifteen shillings a piece, and which might be compressed into such a coat pocket as gentlemen were then permitted to wear.

confusion I found he was in, I told him, if he pleased, I would give him five shillings; to receive five pounds of him when the Great Turk was driven out of Constantinople,' which he very readily accepted.

Steele endured, as usual, a great deal of obloquy from Mr. Addison's treatment of the upholsterer. Arne probably occupied time that our modern Cato would have wished to appropriate otherwise, at his neighbour Button's in Covent Garden. But of Arne, as a parent, the destiny was propitious far beyond all common felicity. His son, Thomas Augustine, was a composer of the highest excellence; indeed almost the last musician of our own school whose writings mean anything. His daughter, Susannah Maria, was the equally celebrated Mrs. Cibber, whom our fathers never mentioned but with a tender delight, that shows her to have shared at least her brother's power, and to have been the gentle mistress of our affections—

'Affectuum potens at lenis dominator.'

As to Doctor Arne, he perhaps possessed more 'air' than any one of our great composers. He rarely repeats[1] himself; and the subject dictated by the poet's words is beautifully worked out into a natural flowing melody, never disturbed by that lunatic, Effect, who in the modern school scorns all unity, and will not allow one sentiment the duration of four bars, but starts away into *capriccios* that amuse, perhaps, by their wildness, or give the unnatural delight of needless difficulty amazingly surmounted.

His works for the theatre are almost innumerable, when, in addition to his operas, we remember all the exquisite songs which, at the request of the manager, he wrote for any novelty or revival of the day, and which too often,

'Like rich and varied gems inlay
The unadorned bosom of the deep.'

Almost all the scores of Arne perished in the conflagration of Covent Garden Theatre. By scores the musical

[1] Such poverty is but seldom allied to beauty; yet in music there is one striking instance of it—Jackson of Exeter. One of his canzonets contains his whole secret either as to cantilena or harmony. Yet how beautiful the little he has written!

reader knows I mean the orchestral distribution of the composition into instrumental and vocal parts—the whole science of harmony and mystery of accompaniment.

I reflect with infinite pleasure upon the circumstance that I first heard the music of Arne sung in a style which I must presume to have been his own: when a succession of musical sounds was plainly delivered, the fair note occupying all its proper time; not docked and curtailed for the intrusion of the graces, the eternal *appoggiature* characteristic of modern execution. That we are capable even still of better things, where the power to give them exists, is demonstrated by the astonishing charm which attended the singing of 'In infancy our hopes and fears,' by Madame Vestris. What ever surpassed it in simplicity or steady truth of tone? In my much-loved retirement I hear of her efforts since in various departments of the drama, for most of which she can be only slenderly gifted; and it reminds me of the honours which a Roman Emperor was for bestowing upon his horse. The steed was a beautiful and perfect work of nature—but why should he be consul?

It might have been supposed that Arne's genius would have made him wealthy; but though his father's mania, politics, was not the cause of his embarrassments, the more excusable attachment to the fair sex is said to have plunged him in many and even serious difficulties. The print of Arne resembles Rogers the poetical banker.

On the subject of his sister, Mrs. Cibber, I once gave great offence to a critic of the day by saying that 'from the greater female interest in certain plays, she would have overwhelmed Garrick.' It had always been credited that the great actor was extremely sensitive upon the subject of popular favour, and that he even practised many arts as a manager to secure to himself the most constant pre-eminence. When new pieces were presented to him, he is said to have looked rather anxiously to the comparative value of the male and female characters; and as it was by no means favourable to a tragedy to be performed without Mr. Garrick, so he might deem it equally below the public expectation and his own consequence for him to accept a character inferior even to one other in the play. I alluded,

I remember, to three instances of this sort. I said that 'the true secret of Mr. Garrick's coldness to *Douglas*, *Cleone*, and the *Orphan of China*, was that in them the female interest predominated—Mrs. Cibber would have overwhelmed him'; using Mrs. Cibber here as the principal actress of the time, and not at all intending a comparison between the talents of those great performers. But our critic really almost heats himself into anger upon the bare notion that, however unequal the weapons, his great actor could possibly be foiled. It leads him into false logic, as well as unnecessary contest, for thus he mentions their combined performances: 'Mr. Garrick performed with her in more arduous characters, those of Shakespeare and Otway, yet there is no record of her power to overwhelm him.' If the writer mean that the disparity between the female and male character be greater in the plays of Shakespeare and Otway than in the three tragedies above-mentioned, the whole dramatic world will be of a different opinion; if he do not mean this, the remark is nothing to the purpose.

But on this subject I am unwilling to leave a doubt even in the critic's own mind. Nothing can be less liable to disturbance than the mind of a genuine critic. We will, therefore, if he will have the goodness to accompany me, look at these 'more arduous,' or rather, indeed, only characters written by Shakespeare and Otway which Mr. Garrick could have acted with Mrs. Cibber. He acted Romeo to her Juliet—but Romeo is the superior character. Othello, if he had continued to act it, greatly exceeded Desdemona. Hamlet, in the same or even greater proportion, transcended Ophelia. A man must be as insane as Lear himself to suppose that Cordelia approaches him in histrionic display. So much as to Shakespeare. Otway has only two plays, *Venice Preserved* and the *Orphan*; and I believe that Jaffier and Pierre and Belvidera are pretty equally written, and that the same thing may be said of the parts of Castalio, Chamont, Monimia. I believe I have noticed the whole of these 'more arduous' characters. There is not among them a single instance of a great and transcendent female part to which the male character was

strikingly inferior. I have been tempted to show that where the ingenious critic designed to crush me with his science, the blow has neither strength nor skill.

But, after all, if I had ventured to suppose that 'any mortal mixture of earth's mould,' in unequal or even equal parts, could have shaken the supremacy of Garrick, should I have been singular? Let the critic read the following passage in Lord Orford's ixth volume. 'I never could conceive the marvellous merit of repeating the works of others in our own language with propriety, however well delivered. Shakespeare is not more admired for writing his plays than Garrick for acting them. I think him a very good and very various player—but several have pleased me more, although, I allow, not in so many parts. Quin, in Falstaff, was as excellent as Garrick in Lear. Old Johnson far more natural in everything he attempted. Mrs. Porter and your Dumesnil surpassed him in passionate tragedy; Cibber and O'Brien were, what Garrick could never reach, coxcombs and men of fashion. Mrs. Clive is at least as perfect in low comedy—and yet to me Ranger was the part that suited Garrick the best of all he ever performed. He was a poor Lothario, a ridiculous Othello, inferior to Quin in Sir John Brute and Macbeth, and to Cibber in Bayes, and a woeful Lord Hastings and Lord Townley. Indeed his Bayes was original, but not the true part: Cibber was the burlesque of a great poet as the part was designed, but Garrick made it a garreteer. The town did not like him in Hotspur, and yet I don't know whether he did not succeed in it beyond all the rest. Sir Charles Williams and Lord Holland thought so too, and they were no bad judges.'

Heaven forbid that I should compare the talents of the two critics together; as to their ages, one had reached his maturity at the time of observation, the other could be but a youth.

The winter theatres offer little to my notice, at the close of this season, but the sale of Mr. Lacy's share of the Drury Lane patent to Messrs. Sheridan and Co. As I never knew how the one party was reduced to sell, and still less how the leading proprietor was ever enabled to buy, I choose to drop the stage curtain over this matter of business.

The theatre closed on the 28th of May with the sixty-fifth night of the *School for Scandal*—

'That ran, and as it ran, for ever will run on.'

Colman opened his Haymarket on the 18th of May, and Miss Harper became the most vocal of his 'haymakers.' She wanted something in Rosetta, but it was by no means a sweet and pure style as a singer. It was rather the style of her rank, and this more from timidity than any deficiency of refinement.

My predecessor, as an historian of the stage, Thomas Davies, had failed in his business as a bookseller, and, returning to his very humble efforts as an actor, for a single night, took a benefit on the 27th. He chose—'a stroke of undesigned severity'—the comedy *The Way of the World*, and after a silence of fifteen years performed the part of Fainall. Davies's countenance was Garrick's, with all its fire quenched. His expression was placid and genteel, and in my youth I used to call in upon him, and enjoy his kind and communicative spirit, in the small parlour behind his shop in Russell Street, Covent Garden. In his difficulties, he obliged me with sundry books, in which his own name had been written. I hope even then I felt that it increased their value. I regret to see that some subservience to Steevens and other commentators, with perhaps the stage depreciation of Jonson to aid it, led poor Davies to write inconsiderately as to the feeling of Ben for Shakespeare, and that Mr. Gifford has involved him, in consequence, in a very severe chastisement, bestowed upon all those who prattled about Jonson's malignity. I wonder he did not see the disparity of his own course. How could Davies sully the fame of Jonson?

On the 11th of July, the manager of the 'little theatre' brought out his summer comedy, *The Suicide*, which I saw repeatedly during its run. Colman had now determined to draw largely from Fletcher; for he here used his play called *The Coxcomb*, and followed it in a few weeks by an alteration of his masterly production, *Bonduca*. The opening scene of this tragedy is by many degrees the best in the English drama; and Digges was 'himself alone' in the

manly character of Caratach. I cannot omit the opportunity of giving some of its noble features, and when the reader shall have banqueted upon the force, the ease, the truth, the nature of Fletcher's hardy Briton, he may turn to the more refined and scholastic display of the same hero by Mason.

The Queen Bonduca having obtained a victory over the invaders, soon forgets their character, and insults her enemy. Her cousin Caratach thus reproves her:—

'*Car.* You call the Romans 'fearful fleeing Romans,
And Roman girls, the lees of tainted pleasures':
Does this become a doer? are they such?
Bond. They are no more.
Car. Where is your conquest, then?
Why are your altars crown'd with wreaths of flowers?
The beasts with gilt horns waiting for the fire?
The holy Druides composing songs
Of everlasting life to victory?
Why are these triumphs, lady?—for a May-game?
For hunting a poor herd of wretched Romans?
Is it no more?—Shut up your temples, Britons,
And let the husbandman redeem his heifers;
Put out our holy fires; no timbrel ring;
Let 's home and sleep;—for such great overthrows,
A candle burns too bright a sacrifice,
A glow-worm's tail too full a flame.'[1]

Caratach then takes his revenge by a satirical picture of the Britons.

'Have not I seen the Britons, (*Bond.* What?) dishearted,
Run, run, Bonduca! not the quick rack swifter;
The virgin from the hated ravisher
Not half so fearful? not a flight drawn home,
A round stone from a sling, a lover's wish,
Ere made that haste that they have. By [the Gods]
I have seen these Britons, that you magnify,
Run as they would have out-run Time, and roaring,
Basely for mercy roaring: the light shadows,
That in a thought scur o'er the fields of corn,
Halted on crutches to 'em. Yes, Bonduca,
I have seen thee run too, and thee, Nennius;

[1] This powerful expression, printed too by Shirley, himself a poet, in the folio 1647, was thought corrupt, and *a* became *of* at the next turn; though that change demanded an *'s* also to the word tail. Nobody could see that the verb 'burns' was equally governed by the candle and the glow-worm.

Yea, run apace, both ; then when Penius,
The Roman girl, cut through your armed carts,
And drove 'em headlong on ye down the hill ;
Then when he hunted ye, like Britain foxes,
More by the scent than sight ; then did I see
These valiant and approved men of Britain,
Like boding owls, creep into tods of ivy,
And hoot their fears to one another nightly.'

For powerful sarcasm, figurative beauty, and overwhelming vigour, what is there like this ? But the chidden train have just breath enough to remind Caratach that he had also fled. They but furnish him with new matter, honourable alike to himself and to his admired Romans.

'*Nen.* And what did you then, Caratach ?
Car. I fled too,
But not so fast : your jewel had been lost then,
Young Hengo, there ; he trasht me, Nennius :
For when your fears outrun him, then stept I,
And in the head of all the Roman fury
Took him, and with my tough belt to my back
I buckled him ; behind him my sure shield ;
And then I followed. If I say I fought
Five times in bringing off this bud of Britain
I lie not, Nennius. Neither had you heard
Me speak of this, or ever seen the child more,
But that the son of virtue, Penius,
Seeing me steer through all these storms of danger,
My helm still in my hand, my sword my prow,
Turn'd to my foe my face, he cried out, nobly—
'Go, Briton, bear thy lion's whelp off safely ;
Thy manly sword has ransom'd thee : grow strong,
And let me meet thee once again in arms ;
Then, if thou stand'st, thou art mine.' I took his offer,
And here I am to honour him.'

But I must here close the extracts from this most magnificent scene—I already hear the monitor. Everybody has Beaumont and Fletcher. Yes, and, not to catch the tone of Caratach, I know pretty accurately the condition of all the volumes. Happily for the possessors, books cannot be displayed till they are bound. The sharp edge of the binder's plane absolves the paper-knife from its hopeless task. It gives me the greatest satisfaction to say that Digges was the very absolute Caratach of Fletcher. The solid bulk of his frame, his action, his voice, all marked him with identity. I mean assuredly to honour

him when I say that it was quite equal to Kemble's Coriolanus, in bold original conception and corresponding felicity of execution. There are reasons, however, as Bottom says, why this play can never greatly please. Its close leaves our love of country without hope: the heroic Bonduca compels her daughters to swallow poison, and drains the bowl herself. Caractacus, after the loss of Hengo, is persuaded to surrender himself to a brave foe, and is marched away for Rome to swell the triumph of Suetonius; but not before he has uttered one sentiment as to making peace with an invader, which shall close this, I hope not misplaced, triumph of Fletcher.

> 'That hardy Roman,
> That hopes to graft himself into my stock,
> Must first begin his kindred under ground,
> And be allied in ashes.'

The widow of the late Spranger Barry, perhaps indiscreetly, all things considered, married again at Dublin. Her husband, Crawford, was, as an actor, nothing compared with Barry. Though he had not Barry's height, he had certainly not Barry's gout; and was, when I saw him afterwards in Pierre, a very fine figure. I have heard that the great actress herself was much offended at the scanty measure of his town success.

As the casualties of theatres, of any size, call for brief notice in a work like the present, I know of none which excited greater interest than the death of the younger Linley, who was unfortunately drowned at Grimsthorpe, the Duke of Ancaster's seat in Lincolnshire, on the 5th of August. He and his accomplished sister were, by invitation, to pass the summer amid a great variety of elegant festivities, to which no people in my time could more powerfully contribute. His death left a melancholy impression of more than common length, and it employed, I think, the pathetic talent of Mr. Sheridan.

Among a number of agreeable features which distinguished Colman's house, one was a rather particular attention to musical farces; and I even still remember the effect of Bate Dudley's *Flitch of Bacon*. Edwin's Tipple was an exquisite treat. Had he but imitated the habit

which christened him, he might have long continued the most diverting creature that the modern stage has known. Pardon one of the slips of age: the actually modern stage, that of 1825, has its own comic wonder, Liston; but, it may be feared, not for any extended period. I understand him to be happily independent in his circumstances, and much disposed to retirement.

The present Haymarket season, 1778, saw on the boards, for the first time, the younger Bannister, then a youth of eighteen, who acted for his father's benefit the very amusing character of Dick in *The Apprentice*. I have already noticed the attention paid to him by Mr. Garrick; and am to record the success of his appearance here, on the 27th of August, 1778, as commencing the long train of his comic triumphs. He, with many others, who must present themselves to memory, was never so perfectly at home anywhere as on this first stage of his theatrical journey.

CHAPTER VI

It might be supposed that Drury Lane Theatre would have proved a safe harbour for the only actor who seemed to have formed himself at all in tragedy upon Mr. Garrick—but it was quite otherwise. Mr. Henderson had been engaged by Mr. Sheridan at the very handsome salary of ten pounds a week, besides buying up the forfeiture on his articles with Palmer, the Bath manager, by a privilege to act there the unpublished *School for Scandal*. Yet, strongly as Garrick now delivered his opinion in favour of Henderson's talents, he by no means realised at Drury Lane the promise he had raised in the Haymarket. Colman had rewarded his exertions by a sum very near three hundred pounds, and had every disposition to serve him; but the actor would not allow himself his full advantages with that excellent man, for, in the daring folly of mirth and wine, he absolutely mimicked Mr. Colman before a large company, at the manager's table; and if the wit became afterwards cool towards the mimic, it can excite no astonishment. It would have been indiscreet, if he had even been an actor—it was indecent towards a manager, a scholar, and a gentleman, his patron and his host. But the mimic is content to show his own power, and indulge the malice of others; and the victim of this ungenerous sport—

'He most must laugh'—

he must, according to the everlasting prescription of Jaques in such cases, 'seem senseless of the bob,'—in order that any lurking folly about him may not be 'anatomised.'

The causes of Henderson's inefficiency at Drury Lane were various. The School of Garrick had possession; and

though the new actor, who had never served under their master, more resembled him than they who had, they yet turned themselves and most of their friends against him; and the critics in their interest occupied the daily press with all the illiberal sarcasm and ignorant decision to be expected from persons of slender reading and immense importance; constantly hurrying into a cabal, and doing their 'deed of darkness' in mystery and in haste. The style, too, of Henderson did not assimilate with the tone of the company. They declaimed in a higher key, and more upon the level. The frequent undertones of the former hardly struck the ear at any considerable distance. Had I never seen him but at Drury Lane, I should not have conceived him to be the great actor that he really was. In the summer of 1778 he went to Ireland, but universal distress and poverty had withdrawn the public from the theatre. The Lord Lieutenant's presence afforded a harvest of only fourteen pounds three shillings—to his Hamlet. His Falstaff brought the distressed manufacturers of the country a house of about seventy pounds. Shylock did not produce expenses, and consequently could not bestow a pound of flesh upon the most wretched claimant. Such a state of things occurred under the beloved lieutenancy of the Duke of Leinster. The few last seasons of the Dublin Theatre have, in recent times, attracted every theatrical charmer to the spot, as the great mart of talent. The present house will hold, and sometimes does, near five hundred pounds; and yet, with such a sign of prosperity in the capital, the disqualification of about twenty leading Catholics is convulsing a flourishing nation to its centre; and threatening, perhaps trying to provoke, a civil war. The only wise measure has been abandoned—a provision for the Catholic Clergy. Have they kept the people quiet? Reward them for conduct so truly Christian. May they stimulate them secretly to excesses? Remove from them at all events one motive, sometimes finessed, never acknowledged,—to obtain the pasture necessary even to the pastor himself.

At the opening of the winter season of 1778-9, Reddish made his first appearance at Covent Garden Theatre in the character of Hamlet. The actor had realised what some

critics have thought of the character. Poor Reddish had occasionally thrown out flashes of actual insanity, and his performance of so powerful an assumption of madness will not be imagined the best cure for a distempered fancy. It is, perhaps, to be easily accounted for that he should discover his most powerful effort in characters of this description. Reddish was also greatly admired in poor mad Tom, who indeed, on the modern stage, reduces Lear's lunacy to mere imbecility, the dotard wanderings of an idiot. It is only in the page of actual Shakespeare that the monarch is 'every inch a king,' even in his miseries. There we detect the cheat of Edgar—have leisure to weigh the fashion of lunatic possessions (Flibbertigibbet, Modo, and Mahu) with that fierce fever of the brain, working upward from the heart, and raving of unnatural children, of imaginary trial, and punishment to terrify mankind. There we perceive at once the full absurdity of the dispute whether Lear is most affected by the ingratitude of his daughters or the loss of sovereignty. He retains, to be sure, the habits of command, and flows in the language of majesty—but observe the order as to Regan, and all doubt will vanish, before the voice of nature, far 'above all art in that respect.'

'Then let them anatomise Regan! See what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature, that makes these hard hearts?'

The sure taste or surer feeling of Shakespeare led him to anticipate a rule as to dramatic interest delivered by a great French writer, *i.e.* 'to found it rather on a feeling than a circumstance; and that the personage be removed from the spectator by his rank but near to him in his misfortune.'

Lear is the happiest exemplification of such a principle. The loss of his crown would touch few, for we cannot sympathise with him as a king. But as a father he is restored to our community; is invested like ourselves with a misery that all may have to bear—the ingratitude of his children.

Nor is the other question as to Hamlet's insanity of much more moment. Such innovations upon the received opinions of men are commonly the efforts of those who, being able to add nothing to acknowledged truth, 'hope for eminence

from the heresies of paradox.' Ingenuity speedily suggests an argument, and a sophism is easily supported by partial quotation and unsound inference. A common understanding is confounded by seeming subtlety. But, whatever becomes of the temporary argument, the character of Hamlet is safe as long as the text of Shakespeare is permitted to remain unaltered. I had an early taste of the rashness of alteration. When Lear disclaims Goneril for his daughter by the phrase, 'Degenerate bastard, I'll not trouble thee,' a critic remarked on the passage, 'Tate has "degenerate viper," which we think better.' Now a degenerate viper can only be one whose original venom is become inferior to its virulent stock—the very contrary to what the poet would have us conclude; namely, that as to Goneril, the milk of human kindness had been so completely turned into gall she could be no child of Lear's.

As a modern House of Commons legislates upon questions of literary property, I wish the excellent Minister for the Home Department would bring in a Bill to preserve the purity of Shakespeare, and punish all invasions upon his language as severely at least as those upon mere manor-right. The gentlemen of the country are even a more respectable body than the country gentlemen; and as to his works, every liberal being is a copy-holder.

Sheridan had not thought even a temporary trifle below his talents, and in this military season brought out an entertainment called *The Camp*. It answered the purpose extremely well, and had every justice in the representation that an author could desire, but which a manager alone can at all times secure. Pilon, too, had a farce at the other house, called, still more pointedly, *The Invasion*: I have forgotten it; probably its merits.

Kenrick, notwithstanding his treatment of Garrick, made himself so important to managers that Harris brought out at Covent Garden his comic opera, called the *Lady of the Manor*. It was merely an alteration from Charles Johnson's *Country Lasses, or the Custom of the Manor*. Pope seems to have been able to lay nothing heavier to this author's charge than his own weight—unless indeed it were his frequenting Button's every day in the hope of seeing Addison;

a happiness not to be balanced by an awkward niche in the *Dunciad.*

Henderson read the Fables of Æsop so delightfully, as written by Vanbrugh, that old Sheridan thought the piece might be suffered as a two act farce upon the modern stage. But audiences sometimes overlook the poetic truth that 'men are but children of a larger growth,' and would by no address of the powerful comedian be lured back to their early friend. The truth is, that the fable of the piece was completely lost in the Fables of Æsop. The house got tired of an eternal lecture; and looking about for something that they could exert their spleen upon, they fastened on that horrid savage, the Country Squire, who, one hundred years back, they say, loved his hounds better than his wife. As modern times were, I suppose, uncursed by such an animal, the audience damned the character as entirely out of nature.

The last day of the year closed the existence of John Dunstall, one of those happy beings whose nature cuts short all ceremonial, and who are approached to general affection by some jovial or familiar compellation. Jack Dunstall, as everybody termed him, was an actor of comedy, as it lies between the rustic and the splenetic—not reaching to the highly voluptuous in character. Of Foresight and Sir Sampson Legend, he must have been the latter. He could not get nearer to Falstaff than the Spanish Friar. His companionable qualities led him into numerous societies, of which he was the admired songster. As I have sat when young listening to my father, who would sometimes sing at my entreaty that glorious old sea song—

> 'Thursday in the morn, the nineteenth day of May,
> For ever be recorded the famous ninety-two;
> Brave Russel did espy, at break of day,
> The lofty sails of France advancing to.'

He always concluded by saying, 'Ah, boy, you should hear Jack Dunstall sing that song!' I quote it now from memory, and could hardly endure to read it. Dunstall was always highly respected and beloved, and a steady and useful servant of Covent Garden Theatre. He had only entered his sixty-third year when he quitted this mortal

stage, which he had delighted by no mean powers, either vocal or humorous. I have just pointed to recollections, which the youthful reader is in his turn to enjoy; and in the sometimes painful descent of age towards the common harbour, it is even wise to cultivate and dwell upon these early pleasures. With our present blunted sensations, we know that they once were keen; and the perhaps undue celebrity given to what did delight us, while it adds to the stock of anecdote, may be pardoned the slight tinge with which it is coloured by our vanity. There is considerable merit in every age; and it should always be remembered that the present will one day become the past, and the excellence now disputed receive all the immunities of antiquity.

I am here reminded of a very amiable lady, who for a series of years honoured me with her friendship. On the 13th of January, 1779, Mr. Henderson married a daughter of Mr. Figgins, of Chippenham, in Somersetshire. One sister of Mrs. Henderson's became the wife of that accomplished scholar, Dr. Henley, and another died recently unmarried. Mrs. Henderson was worthy of her husband, and as far as her quiet and ladylike habits permitted, would at times revive again some of the many festive scenes that were adorned by his sparkling gaiety and unbounded good-humour. A few years only are past since I saw her borne to join once again her excellent husband in the proudest spot of the noblest mausoleum in the world, the Abbey Church of Westminster. She was not herself at all theatrical, nor given to recitation in the slightest degree. If she had ever trusted her voice above the common tone of polite conversation, much might have been preserved of Henderson's peculiar vein of pleasantry, for her memory was excellent. She had lived during six too rapid years among the friends of the great actor; and few men, even in his attractive profession, were ever surrounded by more learned or more brilliant companions. Of him and them it was her delight to speak. She loved her independence, and upon her daughter's union with Mr. James Moore, the brother of Sir John, the General, she devoted a long but not a melancholy widowhood to the occasional society of

friends by whom she was greatly respected, and a pretty general acquaintance with the literature of her period. I have frequently conceived her to resemble strongly the portrait of Mrs. Montague, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, I mean that in years; but I am sensible that prominent features and pale complexions, where the habits are thoughtful and the manners ladylike, class themselves unavoidably in advanced life, and the portrait of one may not fancifully be taken for the resemblance of all.

At Drury Lane Theatre the most important novelty from Henderson was certainly King John; and in the great scene with Hubert his deep smothered undertones had even a terrible effect upon those near enough to enjoy the cunning of the scene. The distant auditor complained, as will constantly be the case in theatres of any size, unless a mode of utterance be adopted by the actor very far indeed removed from the natural elevation or usual articulation of the voice. Yet I am here referring to a theatre not half so large as our present incumbrances. The inference which is material to our taste may be thus drawn. The usual attractions of the old stages will seem bare and insufficient on the modern. The common interest will be heightened by spectacle, and by degrees the principal be swallowed up in the accessory. In the meantime what will be the comparative fate of the ancient and modern drama? The one will be eternally read, and seldom played; the other acted in its day, but never read.

On the 20th of January, 1779, Mr. Garrick expired at his house in the Adelphi. Mr. Pott, the surgeon, pronounced the immediate cause of his dissolution a palsy in the kidneys. As is commonly the case, I understand, in such complaints, his mind was undisturbed, his feelings tranquil, a stupor sat upon the brain, and the last scene closed without a groan. Davies has repeated the silly cheat of some player, in a supposed quotation from Horatio, which escaped him on seeing such men as Drs. Schomberg, Heberden, Warren, and others enter his apartment, as friends, to try whether their skill could save him.

> 'Another and another still succeeds,
> And the last fool is welcome as the former.'

In such a situation, at least, Mr. Garrick was no actor, and life itself no jest. Besides, he had not at any time absolutely despaired of recovery; and, from his natural politeness and good sense, could never merit the salutation which his own Lear drew forth from the indignant but faithful Kent—

> 'Ay, do!
> Kill thy physician, and the fee bestow
> Upon thy foul disease.'

On Monday, the 1st of February, he was magnificently interred near the statue of Shakespeare, in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey. It is remarkable that Mr. Garrick was honoured with Purcell's grand funeral service, by the choir and a full organ, the body received by the Bishop of Rochester at the great west door. Is money the mere regulator on such occasions? because we have since attended so many silent funerals of great men, that we should like to know the exact sum for which the most exalted genius might receive these vocal honours.

Among the pall-bearers of the great actor were to be seen the Duke of Devonshire, and the Earls of Spencer, Camden, and Ossory. He was followed by Dr. Johnson, by Burke, Dunning, Colman, Barré, and Charles Fox. Every kind of commemoration attended his excellence; but there was one omission which, perhaps, I may account for truly enough, though I only surmise it. Dodsley's Annual Register, both in its chronicle and its appendix, had nothing beyond the common notices of death and burial, and the index omits even those.

Perhaps Mr. Burke, who conducted that publication, meditated an article from his own hand; the hurry of his life, and the incessant calls upon his pen, might lead him to postpone it, and at the moment of going to press, nothing had been supplied beyond the daily article in the newspaper. It is greatly to be regretted. Although Burke had not known Garrick so long as Johnson had, he knew him better, and was a fitter judge of his merits. He had no unmeasured contempt for his profession, nor any physical incapacity for its enjoyment. Had Johnson spoken of his talents, he must have in a great measure trusted to common

fame. Burke had attended him as a master of elocution, and a most profound observer of mankind; he attributed his excellence on the stage to his philosophy of life, and found thus a cause alone adequate to such effects. Of Garrick's farewell performance, the same Register contains not a single word, which I account for in the same manner.

His brother George died two days after the funeral of Mr. Garrick; he had been extremely useful to him in his management, and knew exactly and unambitiously the proper sphere of his abilities.

Mr. Sheridan produced, on the death of his great predecessor in the management, a monody, which Mrs. Yates delivered on the stage. Had the composition itself allowed much variety in the manner of its delivery, Mrs. Yates could not have supplied the changes—her style of recitation was heavy and monotonous, though musical. It was heard with solemn respect, and its close was like a relief from a stately and gloomy ceremonial. Sheridan did here what he did through life; he used freely everything recollected that made for his purpose. In addition to his obligation to Cibber for

> 'The actor only shrinks from Time's award,
> Feeble tradition is his memory's guard,'

he remembered obviously Lloyd's *Actor*, and its paraphrase and commentary, the *Rosciad* of Churchill. A few of his descriptive touches are masterly beyond common portrait; and reading Sheridan we think of Reynolds.

> 'The expressive glance—whose subtle comment draws
> Entranc'd attention, and a mute applause;
> Gesture, that marks, with force and feeling fraught,
> A sense in silence, and a will in thought.'

Among the novelties of the season, expectation was much interested about a tragedy from the pen of Jephson. It was brought out at Drury Lane Theatre, on the 8th of February, and called the *Law of Lombardy*. It was the least popular of his productions. The subject is that of Shakespeare's *Much Ado*, a nauseous villany interrupting the happiness of virtuous love. It is the tale of Geneura

in Ariosto's fifth book, who inserted it in his *Furioso*, as Spenser did into his *Faerie Queene*, because he thought himself, as to episodes of all kinds, only bound to see that they were entertaining. The audience did not find this quality in the *Law of Lombardy*; it was in force only nine nights, and was then repealed.

Covent Garden, on the 13th, presented a very pleasing singer to the public in the person of Miss Thornton. Although not the first of Rosettas by many, she discovered a singularly clear and most pleasing quality of voice, and became one of those steady favourites who always delight and are never to be displaced. Every reader will recognise in this character the late Mrs. Martyr. She seemed to form herself on Catley, but she had only the shrill pipe of her predecessor; the genius, the soul, the enthusiasm did not animate a second frame in music. Doyle, who was the Hodge to Miss Thornton's Rosetta, had voice enough for the whole village; but he could not stop at the rustic, he was vulgar. This distinction is highly important—it was known to the first Blanchard; it is now felt, and uniformly seen, in Knight, of Drury Lane Theatre.[1]

The promise of Mason, the poet, had been great; but I presume the progress of Church preferment made him think it indecent to allow his talent to wander towards the stage. Like most men, he summoned criticism to confirm him in prejudice, and justified, in a few letters of no great merit, his preference of the Greek drama. He, however, did not disdain to make some few alterations in his *Elfrida*, for Covent Garden Theatre, and Giardini wrote some new music on the occasion. Mason himself was not meanly skilled in choral and scientific composition. This also tended strongly to enamour him of the Greek choruses, to which music is supposed to have been a powerful adjunct. But Music is seldom a useful friend to Poetry, it is rather a mighty neighbour; they who invoke his aid perish by his assistance. It may be worthy of remark, that Bishop Hurd, the friend of Mason, seems to have shared with him these classical predilections. Warburton had commented Shake-

[1] Since this sentence was written, that valuable performer has made the last exit common to all professions.

speare, and Hurd was sufficiently disposed to idolise the pursuits of his master; yet in a few slight notes on Milton, which he bestowed upon Warton, he thus expresses himself—'Milton shows his judgment here, in celebrating Shakespeare's comedies rather than his tragedies. For models of the latter he refers us rightly, in his Penseroso, to the Grecian scene.'

Daly, the Irish manager, was tempted to try his fortune here as a successor to Barry, in perhaps his masterwork, Othello.

The punsters dispatched him in their usual manner—

'A poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard—no Moor.'

Having lost Barry, and gained only Daly, the public was relieved in the mode suggested by Edgar—

'The lamentable change is from the best,
The worst returns to laughter.'

Crawford soon followed him in Pierre. The great actress, in respect to her first husband, Barry, denied him the privileges of Jaffier on the stage.

On the 20th of March, Mr. Cumberland brought out, at Covent Garden Theatre, his masque of *Calypso*. The audience were deaf to her enchantments; and the wonder seems to be, that Cumberland for a moment could think they would be otherwise. The subject belongs to the ballet, and accordingly we have seen *Télémaque* at the Opera House at once the most elegant and attractive spectacle that human grace, to animate the picturesque, perhaps, ever achieved. The Calypso of the Garden was a mere mortal, and met a pretty general doom—nor has the press preserved what at least should have been poetry of the highest order. Homer and Fénélon are genuine sources of inspiration.

The season produced nothing more truly comic than the *Who's the Dupe?* of Mrs. Cowley. In the original cast, King performed the gownsman Gradus. In his person and expression he looked almost the head of a college. He

appeared superior to ridicule. But the author's choice was regulated by his extreme volubility and neatness, and he spoke the garniture of Alma Mater, the virtues of the Cornelias and the Gracchi, with the enthusiasm of one who had been applauded on a learned theatre. John Bannister, who, after Lamash, succeeded to the character, seemed half-disposed to laugh himself at the critical parade that he delivered. But his mortification, to be unsuccessful in spite of all his oratory, and perhaps in consequence of it, had more farce in it than King condescended to; and at eleven o'clock at night was the mode best suited to revive a lagging attention, and secure the indispensable applause.

Just before the close of the season at Covent Garden, namely, on the 6th of May, another tragedy by Miss More was produced, called *Fatal Falsehood*. It made no great impression upon the town; but the ingenious lady, whose farce had been just commended, had received an impression which greatly disturbed herself, though I cannot think it much affected the equanimity of managers. Mrs. Cowley had written a tragedy, called *Albina*, which, in the usual way, had been tendered, I think, to both theatres. Her tragedy had not only been rejected, but the fair author fancied that her fair sister in poetry had in some way benefited by the rival production.

Mrs. Cowley carried the irritability of our happy, or unhappy tribe quite as far as I ever saw it carried. On the present occasion she wrote an angry preface, and, one would have thought, must have then quitted this mortal stage—of tragedy, at all events. The mutual wants of the parties render the accommodations of such quarrels remarkably easy; but I forget that few readers have ever seen the smile of a manager! It happened to Mrs. Cowley, and the case is not a rare one, that her earliest productions were thought her best, and her husband going abroad, the good-natured world of criticism insinuated that the productions of the wife were necessarily the worse for it. Now I do not know that *The Runaway* is a better comedy than *The Belle's Stratagem*; and I do not think that the public have ever said so. Facility, in fact, was the greatest bar to Mrs. Cowley's professional improvement. She

caught up a subject eagerly, and worked upon it in haste. She read with great brilliancy, and if she asked an opinion, it was difficult for it to be a judgment. Besides, who can bring himself to disappoint the gay expectation of an accomplished female?

I have already hinted that Henderson's situation at Drury Lane Theatre was far from pleasant to him. He began to entertain the *goût de comparaison*, and to fancy himself entitled to the first salary of the theatre, which Smith enjoyed—fifteen pounds per week. He had carried Mrs. Henderson with him to Ireland, and the patronage of the Lord Lieutenant had made for him a very considerable emolument, a sum not below three hundred pounds, and he was even pressed to stay there. However a negotiation with old Sheridan, on behalf of his son, had been going on during the summer, and the actor offered himself for twelve pounds per week the following season, and fifteen the next to that.

It will not be supposed that I should undervalue the talents of Henderson. They were of the first order; but he was born for antiquity—the modern dress and the modern language did not suit him. As far, therefore, as it might be the system of a theatre to keep the genius of our fathers before the town, he was of infinite value. Shakespeare, and Fletcher, and Massinger lived now but in Henderson. But our young patentee looked another way. He might be excused if he overrated his own application—his own talent he could not overrate. He saw himself, and others also saw him, as another Congreve; an unfailing source of modern comedy—in dialogue, he had equalled his masters; in scenic contrivance, he had in one instance gone infinitely beyond them. With access to every observation of life, in all its ranks, what was to limit his delineation? Many a golden day-dream of this kind must have shone before his fancy, and his favourite Cave of Mammon, in Spenser, might sometimes seem but a picture of the treasury of his theatre. He would naturally, therefore, look with preference to those performers best suited to comedies like his own. Smith had in such a high, and perhaps the highest value. He was in truth an absolute

gentleman, as the character then showed itself; I mean with a dignity which did not sit stiffly, but that regulated the whole man. The grace of Smith did not remind you of Noverre, though he knew him well, and lived among the fashion whom he taught. It was peculiar to himself, and seemed to spring from the perfection of his form and the manliness of his mind.

While in his own sphere he was delightful, in tragedy he reached the soldier of courage and honour; but the wider displays of nature, the unfoldings of the human heart, the whole moral mystery of man as it rests upon the page of Shakespeare, Smith called only into imperfect being. Thought from his lips never seemed to quicken into language. He was uniform and heavy. After thus touching his merits and his defects I am obliged to confess that, had I been manager of Drury Lane, I should certainly have thought Smith the more useful acquisition. He was nearer the staple of their manufacture. He better agreed with the other talent of their company. Henderson went to Covent Garden Theatre on the terms he had proposed to old Sheridan, and Miss Younge removed at the same time to a house of which she became, both in tragedy and comedy, its very highest ornament.

On the 18th of June 1779 Miss Walpole was married to Edward Atkyns, Esq., of Norfolk. That very charming woman quitted the stage in consequence; and, gaining the matrimonial prize, she certainly left a blank in the theatre. I shall not be suspected of any improper feeling in what I am going to say—as if I repined at the rewards of merit in any profession, or, in the spirit of worn-out despotisms, were for confining any talent to a particular sphere. I have heard of instances in which managers have considered female perfections as almost a property, and have ventured upon even rude expostulation with the intended monopoliser of their charmers. Perhaps the public claim may be yet stronger upon the skill that they have nourished with their applause. For the most part I should think such unions miscalculated. In domestic life, with every splendour around her, the former actress must feel a languor that at first may be taken for ease, but will soon be known to be

wretchedness. Talent, whether it die away or not in its disuse, will want the frequent attestation to its pre-eminence to secure self-esteem. The new sphere demands the display only of common qualities—the former profession is for the most part by the proud mentioned with contempt, and remembered by her who has left it with a sigh. The independent has become dependant. A queen once said, 'My drawing-room will become a green-room.' Had I been a great actress in the circle I would have left it to its splendour, and have disdained to move about it upon sufferance.

At Colman's this summer a comic opera, called *Summer Amusement*, was very successful. There are unions of genius; Beaumont and Fletcher were most constantly united; but the practice was common in our greatest age of dramatic composition. The authors now joined suitably in the production of a single effect were Mr. Andrews, a manufacturer of gunpowder, and Mr. Miles, who was in the Office of Ordnance.

On the 14th of August, O'Keefe, the very genius of musical farce, produced his very attractive *Son-in-Law*. It still takes its turn among the laughable recreations of the theatre; and those who, either physically or morally, know how to value a laugh, will always love the memory of its author.

A very amiable, artless, and even clever man, whom we have lost, among many alterations which showed his love for old English poetry, this summer at Richmond, for his own benefit, tried the effect of the *Two Noble Kinsmen*, under the more catching title of *Love and Valour*. This play upon its titlepage bears a combination till then unseen—William Shakespeare and John Fletcher, who are stated to have been its authors. And indeed, if internal evidence can be at all relied on, no literary fact stands upon evidence which I think more incontestable. I shall take the opportunity thus afforded me to throw, I hope, a steady light upon the subject.

The commentators upon our authors differ as to the portions of this play attributed to Shakespeare. Some critics think them decidedly his; others the imitations of Fletcher of his peculiar manner. But he who could imitate so

accurately, and so much, could have imitated more, and have carried the resemblance through the whole play—*qualis ab incepto processerit.* Yet nothing is more evident than the marks of two distinct manners. One the habit of condensed forcible expression; the other somewhat looser, and, though equable, diffused and of a feebler tone. There is no ground either for supposing that these two bards ever wrote in conjunction. Shakespeare seems always to have stood alone, though frequently, it is true, upon another man's ground. My own theory, and it is mine, I believe, exclusively, the reader shall have. I believe, then, that Shakespeare, about the year 1608 or 1609, devoted some time to the perusal of Chaucer. I conceive that had it been earlier we should have more evident marks of his devotion scattered through the series of his dramas—because no great author ever showed his track of reading more decidedly than Shakespeare. His use of the *Faerie Queene* is constant, of which the first three books were published just as he commenced his dramatic career. Spenser seems to have been a lexicon to him of the highest poetical language; and he learned in the great land of faërie to improve even the mighty line of Marlowe, and with no 'wasteful or ridiculous excess' to add to the splendid colouring of his expression.

When he retired to Stratford, and had leisure for application beyond that which 'he who runs may read,' I dare say he took down Chaucer with him, the great painter of manners, the abstract and brief chronicle of a former but most interesting age. We shall probably err but little in figuring to ourselves the rapturous enjoyment which Chaucer afforded him. Thynne had enabled Stowe to add a valuable glossary to his works; for I make no scruple to suppose that the difficulties found in Chaucer in the reign of George the Fourth were difficulties during that of James the First.

A dramatic mind, in all its reading, looks to the theatre, and what may be convertible to its use. With some astonishment, therefore, that it had never been seized before, he probably caught at the Knight's Tale of 'Palamon and Arcite,' and marked it down as the subject of a new and splendid play. Pressed now by no immediate call from the stage, he wrote a scene occasionally to amuse

himself, and upon various points of the story as he was struck in its perusal. He might leave the loose papers in the volume of Chaucer itself, and upon his death, in 1616, the care of his son-in-law, Dr. Hall, might discover the rudiments of the play among the *Canterbury Tales*, and transmit them to Messrs. Heminges and Condell, that they might ascertain their utility. With great propriety they would consult Fletcher, at that time the chief support of the Blackfriars, and his fertile fancy and rapid pen completed the play as it was printed in 1634.

Mr. Colman this summer produced a comedy called *Separate Maintenance*; it was one of his weaker efforts. I am decidedly of opinion that no modern author was ever more unequal than this excellent writer. Swathing a coxcomb is no doubt very diverting, and sometimes desirable amusement for ladies; but upon the stage its effect does not compensate its indecency. In looking around him for subjects, the dramatist is frequently caught by a laughable incident, as that, for instance, to which I have alluded in the *Spectator*, and a comedy is invented to display it. But such buildings are commonly weak. I prefer the moral origination of the subject, namely, to correct some evil or some folly in life; to effect which a fable is formed, characters are sketched, and suitable incidents invented. The advantages are incalculable of a well-involved interest, drawing forcibly to one point, from which nothing in the piece is actually extraneous. There are many successful instances I know upon our stages of a succession of sparkling scenes with little connection; and they are acted, as I remember selected parts of two of Dryden's comedies once were, the audience neither knowing nor caring how one of the polite parties happened to succeed the other upon the same boards on the same evening. An attentive audience will require a fable regularly developed—the systematic lounger would perhaps prefer five acts from different plays, or five farces of one act each—sustained attention is too burthensome to his levity or indifference.

The winter season of 1779-80 seemed auspicious to the strength of Mr. Harris's company. In addition to Henderson and Miss Younge, who now quitted Sheridan, he

engaged the very genius of entertainment in the person of Edwin. He made his first appearance on the 24th of September in Touchstone—a part for which he had, I think, but few requisites. Touchstone has, in truth, little folly beyond his habit. His characteristics are steadiness of attachment and wanton satire. Jaques flatters himself in thinking he could anatomise life better than he saw it done by the motley-minded gentleman. The degrees of the lie do him infinite honour. He had looked at all the masks of blustering insolence and real timidity. He had studied *The Gallant's Book of Honour*, and knew the preservative for a whole skin. He is swift and sententious, and his good spirits are better to him than costly raiment. Edwin was not shrewd enough for Touchstone, and he did not excite so much merriment as Quick. But King alone spoke the sentences of this best of clowns. Instead of the common fool's coat and odd stockings, he should be dressed after the very beautiful first figure in Mr. Douce's fourth plate, and certainly carry the bauble.[1]

The powers of such actors as Henderson and Digges were favourable to the poets of Shakespeare's age. Massinger, though not so pathetic in his serious plays, nor so truly comic in his lighter efforts, as Fletcher, had yet sufficient eloquence to carry him through tragedy, and for comedy he took the usual furniture of his time—wantons, gallants, gluttons, and gulls: but he, I think, invented nothing. His power was in his finish; his composition is faultless—he fed on thoughts

> 'That voluntary move
> Harmonious numbers.'

On the 13th of October Cumberland produced an alteration of the *Bondman* at Covent Garden; but as he did not print it, and the play passed off with but a cold reception, I am afraid we must come to the conclusion that, upon the whole, this author is fitter for the closet than the stage; and that, with the exception of *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* and *The City Madam*, Massinger can but occasionally delight his countrymen of another age. Indeed, he

[1] *Vide* Illustrations of Shakespeare (1807).

is commonly selected as a writer favourable to the declamation of some oratorical performer.

On the 30th of October Mr. Sheridan brought out, at Drury Lane Theatre, his most admirable farce *The Critic, or a Tragedy Rehearsed.* In another work I have shown the author to have been a diligent reader and imitator of our old divines. I have traced the pointed smartness of Puff to the page of Dr. Barrow, and proved a sermon upon facetiousness to be the actual source of the neatest comic dialogue we have. Sheridan was in truth a sort of chameleon; he became coloured by the objects of his recent study. His resemblance is quite unforced. He is in one page quite as like Junius as in another he was to Barrow. Upon Dangle's remark that even Vanbrugh and Congreve were now obliged to undergo a bungling reformation, Sneer thus replies:—

'Yes; and our prudery in this respect is just on a par with the artificial bashfulness of a courtesan, who increases the blush upon her cheek in an exact proportion to the diminution of her modesty.'

How precisely does this resemble the mind and manner, the keenness and turn of the following sentence in Junius:—

'But you have discovered your purposes too soon; and, instead of the modest reserve of virtue, have shown us the termagant chastity of a prude, who gratifies her passions with distinction, and prosecutes one lover for a rape while she solicits the lewd embraces of another.'

I am persuaded that nothing but a birth in 1752 saved Sheridan from the strange competition for the honours of Junius—but although a Harrow youth may have Greek enough, and English enough, to translate the *Epistles of Aristænetus*, the forms of business and the experience of events cannot be anticipated. Perhaps the best among the early efforts of prose was the masterly vindication of Lord Chatham's memory, written by his son, William Pitt, certainly at the age of nineteen.

To return to *The Critic.* The greatest honour that it received was in a sportive allusion by Burke, in his masterly speech upon economical reform in February 1780. He just touches the conscience of the Governor of Tilbury

Fort. 'Rebellion,' says the orator, 'may not now indeed be so critical an event to those who engage in it, since its price is so correctly ascertained at just a thousand pound.'

TILBURINA.

'A thousand pounds!'

GOVERNOR.

'Hah! thou hast touch'd me nearly.'

I may just observe of this accomplished man that I think his dedicatory tone, whether in verse or prose, is laboured and artificial. He is too solemn for compliment, he is too tedious for passion; yet the dedications of *The Critic* to Mrs. Greville, and *The School for Scandal* to Mrs. Crewe, will be admired for their ingenuity. Among the literary features of Opposition it may be no unpleasant one that they have generally made goddesses of the ladies of their party. But memory will excuse a poetical rapture in favour of exalted talents and unrivalled personal charms, with friendship that knew no bounds but those of honour. Let me brighten one page by inscribing upon it a name which suggests all these perfections of the sex—Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire.

'Men may be read as well as books too much.' Surely we were now too much occupied with Mr. Cumberland. On the 13th of October he had produced his *Bondman*, with slender effect; and yet, 'within a month,' we behold him, on the 10th of November, blending with a rash hand the *Duke of Milan* and Fenton's *Mariamne* together. It cannot be supposed that I undervalue Fenton. With Pope he could blend naturally and imperceptibly—but as easily might the great satirist unite with Hall as Fenton with Massinger in a tragedy. In passing over these feeble junctions of past times I am compelled to acquit the present of innovation. D'Avenant began the sacrilege of putting together two plays of Shakespeare. Success emboldened him to mix up baser matter. These remarks flow out of a rooted veneration for our great writers. But what are such considerations when managers demand profitable audiences, and the spoiled hero of the stage requires that a single character should be extended beyond the author's design, and

stuffed out with any striking sentiment or action that may augment the quantum of his applause? Why should not the licenser take care of more than the morals and politics of the stage? Taste is one of the lesser morals.

Mrs. Griffith presented, on the 2nd of December, a comedy called *The Times* at Drury Lane Theatre. Its success was but indifferent. She is best known by the *Letters of Henry and Frances*, which are said to have actually passed between her husband and herself. If the worst of all friendly letters be those written with a view to ultimate publication, the best may be those which, flowing spontaneously from the occasions of the parties, by their intelligence and nature merit such a public disclosure. I write at a period when a deluge of epistolary publications, of all times and from every sort of character, compels one to see the striking advantage of the great fire of London.

The increasing demands for novelty produced a series of hurried and imperfect pieces at our theatres. Dibdin failed in his comic opera, *The Shepherdess of the Alps*; and Cumberland, a third time in the same season, by his *Widow of Delphi*. One is disposed to wonder a little at the confidence of an author whom rebuffs so repeated could not discourage; but the reliance or the hope of the manager in this case is quite unexampled, unless the modern system of a dramatic undertaker then, unknown to me, existed. The evil of such contracts between managers and authors is the certain preference it implies. If the contractor to supply the market be himself also the judge of other candidates, we are requiring from his candour a decision against his personal interest. Human nature is not calculated for such an ordeal; it shrinks from the test. Nor is this all; where the offering is rejected it by no means follows that it is despised; an ingenious contrivance may be long remembered, a smart sentence may be easily placed beyond the lapse of memory. It may emerge also at a subsequent period, and, like artificial hair, be the graceful ornament of some other head—

'The skull that bred it in the sepulchre.'

One of the earliest and best fruits of the present cultiva-

tion of Covent Garden was the comedy of *The Belle's Stratagem*, by Mrs. Cowley. The stratagem was not exactly a new one, and probable only upon the stage. There what it is necessary should be unseen is never discovered; the same woman or man is in one scene the most awkward, and in the next the most fascinating of mortals; the *alter et idem* is literally accomplished and undetected. Miss Hardy first renders herself hateful, to become as a stranger the object of ungovernable passion. Nothing short of rapture will content her. She knows the influence of the romantic, and in the display of her accomplishments throws a mystery about her person. Her dance is fashioned by the graces, and her conversation realises the Eastern dreams of poetry and love. Such was the character into which Miss Younge stepped, as if it had been but the shadow of herself, and rendered it fascinating beyond any single character of the modern stage. In the refined charmers of other comedies the parts require some disclosure of their art; they calculate their effects and teach the way to them; the tame or timid and retiring virtues are led out by them into exertion, and the triumph even of the play is for others. Here is a unity more perfect; enthusiasm forms the plan, enthusiasm sustains the part, and is the charm by which youth and beauty and virtue become still more lovely.

Miss Younge in Letitia Hardy was never to be forgotten. Where was anything to be found more graceful than her minuet? The balance of the arms even equal to Madame Rose herself. While the superior stateliness of her figure seemed to testify that she was born to ornament a court, and to move in that measure which best represents its majesty and its grace.

But her sensibility was the greater charm, and in Letitia Hardy has never been approached. In the masquerade there is this rather unweighed sentence. 'If my husband should prove a churl, a fool, or a tyrant, I 'd break his heart, ruin his fortune, elope with the first pretty fellow that asked me, and return the contempt of the world with scorn, whilst my feelings preyed upon my life.' I allude to it only to remark that the last line of it was uttered as if under the immediate pressure of such a calamity, and I never witnessed keener

sensibility of tone and manner. The well-educated female needs no caution against the doctrine contained in this sentence. It is not easy to break the heart or ruin the fortune of either a churl, a fool, or a tyrant: to elope is the sole revenge within her reach—an action which such husbands will hardly regret. The disappointed enthusiast is herself the only victim, and has to struggle, probably not long, with the contempt she has provoked.

Lest my fair friends should think that I have stated a dilemma, and left the lovely sufferer without a rule, this may be sufficient: no one breach of duty can justify another; no disappointment of expectations, reasonable or unreasonable, can sanction immorality. Steady discharge of our own engagements, if punishment be thought of, is the severest if ever reflection arrive; and is the only source of consolation if happiness have flown for ever.

There are some other slips occasionally in the dialogue which exact taste should point out where the composition is in general elegant. Mrs. Racket, in the first act, says, 'That may be good philosophy, but I am afraid you will find it a bad maxim.' She means a dangerous practice. The maxim cannot be bad if its philosophy be good; though to act upon it may sometimes lead to disappointment.

A second claims notice because it is in complete violation of a figure the best known and the most admired of such a poet as Pope. 'Misfortunes,' says Doricourt, 'always go plump to the bottom of my heart, like a pebble in water, and leave the surface unruffled.' Our great moral bard saw the surface differently—

> 'Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
> As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
> The centre mov'd, a circle straight succeeds,
> Another still, and still another spreads.'
>
> *Essay on Man*, IV. 363.

Flutter is described by a simile which comes, oddly enough, from a female writer, yet I believe it original. 'You have neither feelings nor opinions of your own, but, like a glass in a tavern, bear about those of every blockhead who gives you his.'[1]

[1] Perhaps better, because clearer, 'drinking-glass' or 'wine-glass.

Mrs. Cowley was a lady of very superior powers, and nothing short of original vulgarity and bad temper combined could at any time have treated such a woman with disrespect. I venture to point out an instance of great skill in a writer to whom human nature was well known. Miss Hardy would captivate Doricourt at a masquerade; observe how the charms are coloured by the place, and the pictures of her fancy have a unity with the scene.

'*Doric.* What if you loved your husband, and he were worthy of your love?

'*Let.* Why, then, I 'd be anything—and all!—grave, gay, capricious—the soul of whim, the spirit of variety—live with him in the eye of fashion, or in the shade of retirement—change my country, my sex,—feast with him in an Esquimaux hut, or a Persian pavilion—join him in the victorious war-dance on the borders of Lake Ontario, or sleep to the soft breathings of the flute in the cinnamon groves of Ceylon,' etc.

Who does not see that this, in a drawing-room, would be mere flight, and beget some alarm for the head of the fair rhapsodist. At a masquerade the splendid vision is perfectly at home, and is received with astonishment and delight as the effusion of a heart 'dearer than Plutus' mine—richer than gold.'

It was in this play that Mrs. Hartley exhibited the interesting beauties of her face and figure in the character of Lady Frances Touchwood, and that Wroughton so distinguished himself by the performance of her affectionate but unfashionable husband. The stage never had anything more masterly than Wroughton's look and exclamations when her town friends are hurrying off his lovely wife to visit the usual places of fashionable resort. Nor have I many more striking recollections than that of F. Aickin, in the character of Saville, vindicating his unsuccessful passion by preserving the wife of his more fortunate rival from the snares of Courtall. Manly, polite, earnest, and sensible—invaluable for what we now want so much in theatres, the importance of a mature, solid, and gentlemanly figure.

Colman's summer season opened with a very pretty prelude called *The Manager in Distress.* The groundwork

was the apologies received from the great actors, who all preferred their cool retreat in Lambeth Marsh, and other suburban shades, to the temperature of the Haymarket. Their letters are read between the manager and his friend in the private room. Upon inquiry, the house, for a first night, is found to look pretty well, orders and all; nothing remains but to apologise to the audience and return the money. The prompter enters for that purpose, but his plea is rendered nugatory by certain oratorical and mimetic personages stationed in the pit and boxes, who not at first being recognised by the house as professional people, a great confusion was produced. When Mrs. Webb arose to address the audience the joke became apparent, and a prodigious interest was excited.

Diderot the philosopher had written a comedy called *Le Père de Famille*; this piece suggested to Miss Lee her very amusing summer play, the *Chapter of Accidents*. The fair author had every aid from Mr. Colman's judgment and experience. Palmer, Edwin, and Miss Farren were the perfect representatives of much genuine interest and humour. In its structure it was rather slight, if I remember; but it was powerfully written, and merited the uninterrupted success which attended it through many seasons.

Miss Sophia Lee, to whom the reading world is under many obligations, has hardly met with the attention to which she has so just a claim. Her father, from some infirmity of temper, had wasted much of his life in controversy, and some of the critical spleen which he had excited seems hardly to have subsided at the literary appearance of his accomplished daughter. As she did not bend implicitly before the daily Stagyrites, they annoyed her with criticism, affecting an extreme morality. She had exhibited frailty in a female of uncommon merit, and they chose to forget the importance of the lesson in the recollection of the indecorum.

The fair author had, however, but completed her design —she had already drawn a Cecilia superior to all temptation, although, for important reasons, she had kept the work (*The Life of a Lover*) from at once surprising, and why should I not say delighting, the public. There she has

indeed indulged and exhausted the other side of the question. As that romance is executed in letters, so it is protracted beyond the just claims of its interest. On this occasion I will not suppress my decision against that mode of composition—any advantages (and I do not deny that there are some) in the epistolary form are easily conciliated with a narrative in either the first or third person; and an occasional letter to a valued correspondent will break the uniformity of the work and animate the pulse of its relation. '*Rien n'est beau que le vrai*'; letters, which are only limited by a quire of paper, can be but rare productions in actual life. Richardson, I remember, is obliged to bestow a general insomnia upon all his characters; they retire to rest, but always rise again to continue the record of their day.

It has been said that much of Miss Lee's personal history may be discovered in *The Life of a Lover*. Cecilia, like herself, is engaged in the work of tuition, for which I have always understood the fair author to have been singularly accomplished. A most interesting and admirable lady of my acquaintance, who was some time under her care, describes her to me as very impressive in her manner, and very eloquent in her instruction. Her eye was brilliant and searching. She inspired her pupils with a respect that continued through life.

A parent can hardly fail to estimate the advantage of placing a youthful mind under a lady capable of writing the following passage, which has all the moral dignity, tenderness, and sweetness of Cowper :—

'Those people know little of mental indulgence who call a winter in the country dreary. It is then that man may become justly conscious of his own importance in creation. All nature works for him in summer, and he has only, in common with every other creature, to enjoy the ripening abundance. Winter calls upon him to dispense what his foresight has saved, and renders him to the mighty mass of inferior beings a kind of subordinate providence. The wind which curls a flood of leaves round our feet sobs to the thinking soul the sufferings of mortality.'—*Life of a Lover*, vol. vi. p. 18.

The establishment of the sisters at Bath was a concern of magnitude, and most admirably conducted. The super-

intendence was with Sophia; Miss Harriet Lee was chiefly devoted to the school. There was no affectation about their system; they did not profess to teach what could be taught nowhere else, nor that their pupils should become informed without steady application. Purity of manners and self-respect were taught by example.

Their father occasionally needed assistance, and found it in their filial piety. Sophia wrote a comedy to free him from embarrassments; this work of genius and affection succeeded in its objects. These excellent sisters at Bath had the cordial friendship of the Linleys and the Sheridans, and the esteem of so much talent insured them the patronage of a very wide and respectable circle.

I am apt to suppose the attention of the fair author conducted to the subject of her happiest work by the controversy to which Dr. Robertson's *History of Queen Mary* had given rise. The honour of the nation seemed to rest in some measure upon the proof of her innocence, the unrivalled villany that surrounded her person, and the wicked persecution of a rival queen. Nor was the English nation much colder on this subject than the Scottish. A powerful interest was excited for the character of Mary, and the appeal to the heart left no room for the reflection that to impeach our maiden sovereign was to sully the glory of England.

The plan of her *Recess* was fortunate beyond parallel. The known designs of Norfolk upon Queen Mary rendered the private marriage probable; and to produce two of the most interesting and unfortunate of the species from such an union was only continuing the calamities of a race which Voltaire conceived to be even sovereign in misery. Throwing one of these children of her rival before Elizabeth in her last moments, heart-broken, like herself, at the loss of Essex, is one of the happiest fictions of romance; and it has a pathos hardly to be approached. The great novelist of the North has yet to excite a sympathy equally profound and dignified—yet who has touched the regal character with so masterly a hand as the author of *Waverley*? Mary, Elizabeth, James, and Queen Caroline are all dramatic biography.

I have made this article somewhat fuller than I intended. But the subject of my present work calls upon me for a particular attention to female excellence, and Bath, the residence of Miss Lee, was the scene also of the triumphs of our greatest actress. I would wish to surround Mrs. Siddons by the splendid ornaments of her sex.

A speaking pantomime called *The Genius of Nonsense* was attempted at this theatre on the 2nd of September. It did not beget a fashion for loquacity in the 'knight of the wooden sword.' If Harlequin lose his agility he may regain his speech; but I confess I would rather have him dumb for ever so he retain his pert, unmerciful activity. The Clown, moreover, should not be a man of many words.

Among the memorables of the season were a performance of Lady Randolph by Mrs. Crawford; a farce called *Fire and Water* by Andrews, remembered only for the younger Colman's jest, 'it made a hiss'; Mrs. Cargill's appearance there as Euphrosyne in *Comus*, and Miss Satchell's first appearance in Polly. It was the apotheosis of Polly, but her own martyrdom. The stage never in my time exhibited so pure, so interesting a candidate as Miss Satchell—her modest timidity, her innocence, the tenderness of her tones, and the unaffected alarm that sat upon her countenance, all together won for her at once a high place in the public regard, which she cultivated long and extended under the appellation—Mrs. Stephen Kemble. This young lady carried into a family abounding in talent powers of so peculiar a kind, so perfect, so unapproachable, that, if they were inferior as to their class, they shared a kindred pre-eminence. No one ever like her presented the charm of unsuspecting fondness, or that rustic simplicity which, removed immeasurably from vulgarity, betrays nothing of the world's refinement, and is superior to its cunning. *Double entendre* in her presence had nothing beyond the single sense that might meet the ear of modesty. I have often listened to the miserable counterfeit of what she was, and would preserve, if language could but do it, her lovely impersonation of artless truth. But it may be gathered critically in its abstract by the negative assistance of many of its modish imitations. The fancy may restore her, or be contented at

least with its own creation. That of Steele, in one of its softest inspirations, first saw her about the year 1674, on the continent of America, fondly bending over a young European whom she had preserved from her barbarous countrymen; she was banqueting him with delicious fruits, and playing with his hair. He called the vision *Yarico*. Chateaubriand, a century after, beheld it with additional charms, and named it *Atala*.[1]

'You observed in her countenance I know not what of virtuous and impassioned, of which the charm was irresistible. To this she added graces yet more tender. An extreme sensibility united to a profound melancholy characterised her look, and her smile had something in it scarce earthly'; and thus unintentionally, painting only the creature of imagination, he completed the portrait of an English actress.

[1] 'On remarquait sur son visage je ne sais quoi de vertueux et de passionné, dont l'attrait était irresistible. Elle joignait à cela des grâces plus tendres; une extrême sensibilité, unie à une mélancolie profonde, respirait dans ses regards; son sourire était céleste.'

CHAPTER VII

It is time to return to Mrs. Siddons, not for the purpose, if it were practicable, of reviewing her performances in the country, but to look a little at the means of her success, as they arose out of her habits of life and her practice of the art. La Clairon used to say that the manners of a tragedian in private life should partake of the stately decorum of the stage. Perhaps the personal appearance of the tragic actress should be sketched out from the Minerva of Milton—

> 'Rigid looks of chaste austerity,
> And noble grace, that dash'd brute violence
> With sudden adoration and blank awe.'

She should neither encourage nor suffer familiarity. Any striking disparity on and off the stage is injudicious. We cannot reconcile the seeming contradictions. Besides that, the relaxations of private habit are apt to give a forced, a strained assumption to the dignity worn at night. The charm of Cleopatra, to be everything by turns, is the captivation of a mistress who must meet us at all moments and in all humours. I dare say that Mrs. Siddons did not form to herself any such system of manners; when she best followed her theatrical interest she, perhaps, but indulged the tendency of her nature. It led her to a calm and rather retired existence—much solitary reflection, and deportment, like her utterance, measured and deliberate. But, if we were to look only to the policy of the actress, such would be the conduct most advantageous. Dignified manners facilitate the intercourse with higher life (the only condition that can serve the tragic actress) and strongly detach her

from the inferior ranks: the vulgar drop off; when the polish is high they cannot cling to the object. Some bitterness may be expected on the part of those whom she repels; they will remember the humility of birth, the slender prospect at one time of present honours, and repeat the prescriptive eulogies of high rank or enormous wealth. But talent of some kind or other is the common origin of both. The soldier or the statesman is ennobled for his utility—the merchant has at least industry, or he could never become prosperous. Nor is the comparison unfavourable to him who consciously bears his honours in their source about him, with one from whom the source is certainly distant, however venerable or celebrated.

But of all those who may be offended by the retired or dignified habits of an actress, the members of her own profession commonly feel them the most, and pursue their soaring sister with the bitterest and most sullen aversion. But their admiration usually combines with their envy or their satire, and it settles in some epithet vented by malice, but aptly characterising the person, who is for ever denominated by themselves and others the 'tragic queen,' or the 'queen of tears.' In the present case, however uttered, the truth was certainly not a libel. The superiority of talent, when it is ascertained, must be borne. In any profession opportunities must occur when the failure of health or spirits will throw shades of inequality into a performance —these afford the anxious rival some immediate consolation, and a hypocritical regret at the failure may conceal the actual pleasure it affords. At last, however, the system of the actress becomes known. All her graces of action, the whole circle of her expression, the character of her declamation are perceived, and must be eternally repeated. It is an art which she possesses, and they will attack her for her art. As truth is one, they will discover that she wants variety. They will insist upon actual instead of simulated emotion; they will allow the performance to be as fine as art can make it, but, in their judgment, 'one burst of nature is worth it all.' The French school at one period possessed two brilliant examples of the two manners; Dumesnil was the explosive heroine, the Clairon

the profound calculator of all her effects. The one, in the indulgence of her nerve and the force of her organ, tore her way to the heart, though she sometimes wounded the ear, and the eye accused her of frequent distortion and occasional vulgarity. Her private habits were not decorous, and she was sometimes unguarded even upon the stage. Her rival, if her organ was not equally sonorous, was never misled by it into harshness and noise. If she trusted more to her judgment than her passion she had always the safer guide. Looking at the character she played analytically, and tracing even the author up to its sources, she knew it more intimately and conceived it with more truth. We are, therefore, little astonished at Mr. Garrick's decided preference of Clairon. She was fortunate in having the pieces of Voltaire to act, and the unwearied application of the author to add every perfection that the character or its actress demanded. The correspondence of Voltaire is full of matter, but he is nowhere more delightful and instructive than in his letters to this charming woman. He weighs every word, every gesture, every look, and his praise is so elegant that it may be said to create as much excellence as it commends.

Mrs. Siddons had no aid of this sort. No writer for her was the standing theme of every tongue—the legislator of elegance throughout Europe. She could only do what had been done before, and establish her superiority in characters long known, and in which novelty could hardly be displayed without becoming a subject of question. I have always considered the powers of Mrs. Siddons to be peculiarly her own, and her effects constantly conceived as well as produced by her own studies. They have one uniform character. There is no littleness, occasionally betraying the hesitation or lovely timidity of the sex. In conception she was even bolder than her brother, and the powers of her execution were in the volume of tone and the vigour of action greatly superior. He had constantly to struggle against a teasing irritation of the lungs, and to speak upon what may be called a safe scale of exertion. His happier sister was never balked by deficiency, she could always execute whatever she designed. Thus relying upon herself,

she pursued her course for a few years wisely at Bath—restored the tragic muse to her honours, even in a place frequented for amusement; and surrounded herself with admirers of the highest rank and of the best taste, who echoed the decision of Henderson, that 'she had never had an equal, and never would have a superior.' Having thus hinted the return in triumph to the capital as a matter certain, and now to be granted to invitations from managers, not solicited by the actress herself, I resume the usual record of the stage and its ornaments.

Mrs. Inchbald, whose husband had died suddenly while they were engaged in the York company, although she felt her loss keenly, was fortunately not overborne by it. Under his skilful tuition she had become an interesting, though not a great actress, and she had conceived an ambition of adding to her attraction the fame, and the profits—still more essential—of a dramatic author. London was the great mart, and she happily accomplished an engagement with Mr. Harris, the proprietor of Covent Garden Theatre. Her trial part was one of the most interesting and romantic that ever came from the fancy of a true poet—Bellario in the *Philaster* of Beaumont and Fletcher.

In the modes by which character may be developed the author will often find the business of the play itself too scanty to unfold it. He resorts, therefore, to description, as a kind of portrait by which the spectator may have a more ample knowledge than can be properly shown in action. Still further to reverse the Horatian precept, there are many incidents of a tender yet simple nature, which are better trusted to the imagination through the ear than to the eye. The first employment of Bellario is of this sort—a pleasing helpless innocence, sitting by a fountain side, and weeping his payment to the nymph for what he had borrowed of her spring to quench his thirst—reading a lecture upon his garland of flowers, to which he had himself given a rare and mystic order, or speaking the most eloquent thanks to the great Preserver for the prime blessings of sustenance and light—should do all this behind the scenes; as Jaques beheld and commented upon the stag in the forest of Arden, the only picture to which that of Bellario

is inferior in the whole compass of the drama. Happily for the successors of Shakespeare Bellario has not been condemned, like Jaques, to describe the scene of meditation, or narrate the floral emblems which he pressed upon the mind of Philaster. If I ever presume to refer the reader to the source of my remark, he may be assured that I mean to gratify more than his curiosity. I now beg him to convert Philaster's description in the first act of the play—

> 'I found him sitting by a fountain side,
> Of which he borrow'd some to quench his thirst'—

into a narrative by Bellario that he was so found, and he will then perceive how he has succeeded to the honours of that not great unknown who sent Jaques on the stage to parade his own melancholy and morality, instead of leaving them where Shakespeare had placed them, in the mouth of one of those elegant and accomplished persons who had put themselves in voluntary exile with the banished Duke.

Fletcher knew well how to make his Bellario speak his own character when it was becoming to do so. Witness perhaps the purest passage of our only diction suited to the romantic drama—his pleading to continue in the service of his master, rather than in fact to serve him in the suite of the Princess Arethusa:—

Bel. 'In that small time that I have seen the world,
I never knew a man hasty to part with
A servant he thought trusty: I remember,
My father would prefer the boys he kept
To greater men than he, but did it not
Till they were grown too saucy for himself.
Phi. Why, gentle boy, I find no fault at all
In thy behaviour.
Bel. Sir, if I have made
A fault of ignorance, instruct my youth;
I shall be willing, if not apt, to learn;
Age and experience will adorn my mind
With larger knowledge; and if I have done
A wilful fault, think me not past all hope
For once. What master holds so strict a hand
Over his boy, that he will part with him
Without one warning? Let me be corrected,
To break my stubbornness, if it be so,
Rather than turn me off, and I shall mend.'

In this little narrative there is one beauty of the highest

kind. A simulated story is rarely quite consistent. When Bellario is first introduced to Philaster, he is 'the orphan of gentle parents,' who, in their poverty, left him to the mercy of the elements. Here he touches the real condition of the concealed Euphrasia, whose father, Bion, had no doubt boys in his establishment whom he would prefer to the service of men greater than himself. To give force to his argument, he a little extends the rank he had previously assigned himself. When the mind warms with feeling the disguises of artifice are too thin for perfect concealment. The pathos of the lovely pleader is far above any praise of mine.

I hope that I do not digress at all when I thus unfold the beauties of our great authors. I will not repeat the criticisms of others; but if my own reading and taste suggest what may lead to the cultivation of sound criticism, I will avow at once that I never intended to write a mere chronicle of events, or a cold catalogue of even good qualities among the professors of the stage. The skill of an actor operates upon the primary skill of the author. The mental excellencies of the poet must be displayed, or we talk in vain of those powers of adaptation by which the stage artist turns them into shape, and bids them live and move before us in embodied force and truth and beauty.

In the performance of the seeming boy, Bellario, I believe the critics assigned the palm invariably to Mrs. Yates; and, from what I saw of that lady in my youth, I can readily believe her superiority. Mrs. Inchbald was extremely interesting, but an occasional hint of the impediment which strongly marked her conversation was perceived by the attentive among the audience. As an actress this lady never increased her value in the company.

The great painter of life, Fielding, as a dramatic writer descended to the broadest farce, the most absurd burlesque. After *Philaster*, an alteration of his *Tom Thumb* by Kane O'Hara once more enlisted the stage into the service of the nursery. From that time to the present the tiny hero and his giant love and valour have insulted the reason of mankind with the cheapest among the modes of diversion. To the staple absurdity of its burlesque were now added

songs of the most wretched vulgarity, and the Fair of St. Bartholomew seemed to be removed from Smithfield to the Garden on the 3rd of October 1780.

Mrs. Crawford, after an absence of six years, now returned to Drury Lane Theatre, and on the 5th of October acted her favourite character, Rosalind, in *As You Like It*, with distinguished applause. This delightful work seems rather calculated for the closet than the stage, even when dignified by the greatest professors of the art—description and satire do their utmost to conceal the want of business, of passion, and surprise. It has been thought that Shakespeare himself, by the introduction of some music (as songs, however) almost sanctioned its conversion into an opera; but what we gain by the vocal accomplishments of the heroine, we commonly lose in the comparative poverty of the actress. There seems an incompatibility between excellent speaking and singing; and what is a little curious, the singer with the most powerful organ is commonly a feeble speaker.

Suett arrived in the metropolis from York, and made his first appearance on the 7th of October, in Ralph, in *The Maid of the Mill.* Few comedians have ever afforded more amusement than Suett. I cannot say that he was strongly characteristic, but he was diverting to every description of audience.

I am every way tempted to bestow more than a common notice upon the first appearance of Miss Philips on the stage, on the 11th of November, in the character of Mandane. She had, I think, scarcely completed her seventeenth year. Her first instructor in music was an organist whose name was Wafer; he had succeeded in bestowing upon his lovely pupil no mean knowledge of the science, and she accompanied herself upon the harpsichord, an instrument which through life she preferred to the pianoforte. She conceived it better adapted to the object of making the pupil sing in tune. There is a smartness which may arouse a dull ear, I confess; but the singer who is not all ear should retire at once from the orchestra. To mine the jangle of the harpsichord wires is anything but harmony. Her father had articled Miss Philips, for three years, to Mr.

Linley, who secured her an engagement at Drury Lane Theatre, and received, as is the custom upon such occasions, one-half of his pupil's salary.

I remember distinctly the surprise which her beauty excited. She was always timid upon the stage, and really needed all the indulgence that she experienced; but there was infinite promise of musical excellence; and as to countenance and figure she realised the visions of even poetical imagination. He who came from the study of Spenser's Una beheld the seeming original of such a portrait in Miss Philips. *Artaxerxes* was a noble attempt to give to the English language and nation the charms of Italian opera. For the sake of musical impression sex occasionally gave way. Miss Prudom was the lover of Mandane, and Mrs. Baddeley wore the kingly robes of Artaxerxes; Miss Wright was the Semira. The evening seemed the triumph of beauty even more than that of harmony. Vernon was not the Artabanes exactly that one might have desired—he was not even a low tenor; but as a musician he was admirable. It gives me pleasure to name Reinhold as the greatest singer of the traitor in my remembrance. Old Bannister had voice enough, but he had not a particle of science, and did wonders without it. In modern times we have had admirable bass singers, but some incurable awkwardness or vulgarity has usually condemned them to the choruses, immovable and unmoved organs of sometimes amazing power.

From this time Mandane has continued a trial part for the pupils of stage composers. The intrinsic beauty of Dr. Arne's melodies kept his *Artaxerxes* among the music first taught the female singer in private life. There was infinite spirit and variety in the airs, and perhaps he touches every stage of the tender passion with a truth almost independent of language. Thus a young female, with the usual aids to a fine voice, as she loses her timidity in singing to her friends, is soon accomplished for public exhibition; for Mandane demands no study of character—she who can sing and walk can do all that is required.

Sheridan had now begun to devote himself to politics, and Linley's taste inclined him strongly to opera. Jackson

of Exeter supplied, perhaps, more than the music of the *Lord of the Manor*. Burgoyne, however, I believe, was the author of the piece, and the tenderness of the composer somewhat compensated the absurdities in the cast of the characters. He made the elder Palmer a fribble, and Miss Farren a singer. Miss Prudom's want of English admitted of an apology; she was brought up in France. Nobody ventured to ask the necessity of her appearance on our stage before she could speak our language. Drury Lane meditated a pantomime which should live more than the usual life of one, and I always understood the business of *Robinson Crusoe, or Harlequin Friday*, to have been arranged by Sheridan himself. De Loutherbourg was employed upon the scenery, and the solitary friend of our youth, in a few scenes finely acted, preserved his interest on the stage—the necessity for pantomimic change hurried the mind out of its salutary sympathy, and reminded the spectator forcibly where he was.

Mrs. Cowley on the fame of her *Belle's Stratagem* hurried again upon the stage. But her present offering was of a very different description from the delicate comedy just named. There is unity of design, great simplicity, and strong though refined effect, in *The Belle's Stratagem*. The audience was indifferent to *The World as it Goes*, and voted the party at Montpelier exceedingly disagreeable. The fair author took a month for alteration, and brought her play again before the town under the title of *Second Thoughts are Best*. The audience did not reverse, but confirmed the original judgment. It was a total failure from hurry and want of intelligent structure. Here again we are invited to consider the paradox of national character. The grave meditating Englishman begins to build without a plan; the volatile Frenchman lays his design deeply, and excels all nations in dramatic fable. We have a wide field of observation—in no country does character or humour present a more abundant harvest—but we are not sufficiently attentive to the homely instruction of honest Touchstone—

'They that reap must sheaf and bind.'

Perhaps the above allusion to our drama may not inaptly

introduce a few remarks upon the literary character of Mr. Edward Capell, who claims a notice in this place as the efficient licenser of the stage, and perhaps one still more distended as an editor of Shakespeare. The duties of the latter function supremely qualified him for the former. The just knowledge of Shakespeare is a touchstone by which dramatic composition will be best estimated in all ages; for is it not the same as an appeal to Nature herself? Of this knowledge no man possessed more than Capell. After a life spent upon the works of his great master, he died on the 24th of February 1781.

It may not be incurious to examine the conception which Dr. Warburton entertained of the highest qualification an editor can possess; in other words, that on which he most valued himself. Take it, therefore, in language certainly his own. In the Life of Pope, compiled from Warburton's materials by Ruffhead, is the following oracular passage:—

'The truth is, that criticism (which Longinus esteemed to be the consummation of human literature) is thought to be the easy task of every witling. What has led them and their readers into this mistake, and will for ever keep them both in it, is the not distinguishing between the discovery of corrupted passages and the cavilling at those emendations which are the fruits of it. To discover the corruption of an author's text, and by a happy sagacity to restore it to that sense in which it was first conceived by the author, is no easy matter; but when once the discovery is made, to cavil at the amended word, and to support the cavil by another equivalent, is the easy and constant achievement of these doughty critics. It is the easiest, and at the same time the dullest, of all literary efforts.'

The glaring absurdity of the above dictum cannot fail to strike the reader. The pith and marrow of the achievement is stated to be the discovery of the passages corrupted, but the more or less felicitous conjecture by which the passage is to be restored becomes a very inferior consideration, or it is rather inferred that he alone who first suspects the passage of corruption has any chance of restoring it, or that at all events to dispute his emendation can only be the easiest and the dullest of all literary efforts. But he

advances in the happy arrogance of his instruction upon this head.

'Yet we have seen editions of this author in which nothing else has been attempted; and we may now predict that nothing else will ever be performed by editors who have spent their time and impaired their sight and intellects in collecting and collating the old quartos.'

Perhaps human assurance never proceeded to so great a length. The works of an author, not collected and published by himself, go through the press in his lifetime (as was the case with about half of Shakespeare's plays); some years after the whole are unskilfully printed from play-house copies, and it is made a high crime and misdemeanour to collect and collate the very copies by which they can be corrected? But the reason of the anathema is apparent. If there should turn up any clear and obvious confirmation of the very passage suspected by the master critic to be corrupt—if the collation of these unlucky quartos should, even to 'impaired sight and intellects,' demonstrate that the great poet, and everybody in his day, certainly wrote the very word which the critic discarded on his puny modern knowledge of our language, what then becomes of the fancied rival of Longinus, and all the fame of his conjectural sagacity?

Poor Capell was in truth a critic of another breed. As far as his fortune and his diligence could aid his pursuit, he collected everything relating to his object, and set himself with suitable modesty to learn even his rudiments in the very 'school of Shakespeare'—he tracked him in his whole course of reading, knowing that he invented absolutely neither character, nor sentiment, nor speech—that he lived in the common atmosphere, however distinguished among his contemporaries, and that to know them accurately was the best, nay, only mode of becoming perfectly acquainted with him. It is the perseverance in this course that has replaced in the text of Shakespeare so many expressions discarded by those who were unacquainted with our ancient authors. Capell was an excellent critic, but an indifferent, or rather bad, writer. He seemed to have read the ancients till he ceased to be a modern. He lost his own tongue

without absolutely acquiring theirs, and is often perfectly unintelligible. Figures are said to be perilous things to careless writers; they are not without danger to the gravest. There is sometimes a fashion of commencement in literary essays which seems to be imperious. Doctor Johnson but swells out the initiatory paragraph of Warburton in his own preface to Shakespeare. A simile is thought as essential among these critics as a sentence, and architecture has been permitted to illustrate the genius of Shakespeare. Pope and Theobald are reminded of a Gothic building. Let us attend to the at least animated figure of Capell.

'It is said of the ostrich that she drops her eggs at random, to be disposed of as chance pleases; either brought to maturity by the sun's kindly warmth, or else crushed by beasts and the feet of passers-by: such, at least, is the account which naturalists have given us of this extraordinary bird; and, admitting it for a truth, she is in this a fit emblem of almost every great genius; they conceive and produce with ease those noble issues of human understanding, but incubation, the dull work of putting them correctly upon paper and afterwards publishing, is a task they cannot away with.'

The reader sees the total failure of this simile in a moment. A play is at its full maturity when it is given to the stage; the egg is already an ostrich. Committing it to the press is like anything but incubation. If the poet had contented himself with sketching merely his fable and characters, and leaving these rudiments to be made plays by those who found them, or to perish among the unheeded rubbish of a lumber-room, the ostrich might have illustrated the negligence of a great genius.

But pardon him his simile, and the Introduction to his Shakespeare is a very masterly effort. It suggested to Mr. Malone the Chronological Essay upon his plays, the History of the Stage, and also the plan of that Life of the Poet which my late friend left imperfect; I mean imperfect only because unfinished, for all that we have of it is perfect beyond comparison, and indeed a masterpiece of antiquarian sagacity and the most unwearied research. 'Before these efforts of Mr. Malone,' as Capell observed, 'in all the writings

upon Shakespeare, the critic and the essayist swallowed up the biographer, who yet ought to take the lead in them.'

I have thought that the unavoidable register of his death was a suitable occasion to record the honours of his literary life; and as that has happened to Capell which seems to be the lot of the laborious—to be the groundwork of fame to others—I think it just to refer the reader to the close of his Introduction to the works of our great poet for proofs of what is here advanced; he will there see a title to his respect of which the editor cannot be divested, and the farther he continues the inquiry the more he will be sensible of the modest merits of the licenser for the stage.

Macklin, the comedian, was now certainly fourscore and upward; and yet so far from yielding to the pressure of age either upon his personal or mental powers, that he had completed his favourite attack upon Scotland, and determined to produce it upon the London stage, and be himself the representative of the Macsycophants. The first title of his comedy, *The True-born Scotsman*, was very properly dropped for one more general, and therefore less offensive—*The Man of the World*. As a literary composition it testifies uncommon strength of mind—of a mind which has imbibed the political prejudices of a century and held to them as a freehold. Macklin had heated himself with the subtle and eloquent essays of Bolingbroke, and, like Tom Davies, considered the *Patriot King* and *The Dissertation upon Parties* and the *Remarks on the History of England* as the almost sacred writings of freedom; and when Junius, who thought the same thing, and built himself upon them, endowed the despicable howl of Wilkes's rabble with the refinements of composition, Macklin delighted in the vigour of his periods, and perhaps still more enjoyed the venom which no less distinguished them.

He transferred the hatred borne by his party to the favourite, not merely as Macbeth did to all that traced him in his line, but to all who were born in the same country; and called upon an English audience to sanction and enjoy his libel upon a people speaking the same language, united in one monarchy, and mixing in fraternal relation with us in every condition of life. To the disgrace of the licenser,

it was allowed to be performed on the 10th of May, 1781; and though there were strong objections to many of its sarcasms, and delicacy was often hurt as well as candour, yet the principal character was so masterly, and acted in such a strain of heartfelt enjoyment by the author, that there is no more chance of its ever being lost to the stage than there is for the dismission of Sir Giles Overreach himself, who seems to have suggested to Macklin the mode of best directing the tide of his prejudice against a whole nation. While there is a great actor, Sir Giles will be performed upon the English stage; and, though of a fiercer and more savage temperament than Sir Pertinax, the characters have so much in common that they will usually be acted by the same person, provided the dialect of the latter do not present an insurmountable bar. This it is not likely should often be the case. Great actors are commonly admirable mimics; the dialect may, therefore, be roughly studied among ourselves, and finished with great nicety by one of those visits to the North which the ornaments of the profession so commonly make for the satisfaction of our neighbours and their own advantage. It is well known that the provinces of Scotland speak dialects differing much among themselves, but the discrimination between them is seldom accurately known to an English ear; perhaps the best rule to an actor is to neglect the nicety and be careful only to speak Scotch; and as the more uncouth anything sounds the more laugh is excited, the broader he speaks the better. Macklin insinuated better than Cooke, but the jovial manner of the latter with Lumbercourt came nearer than Macklin's nature would allow him to come, even in conveying his own intention. They were both excellent and unapproached.

There are few modern productions marked by strong satire and pointed dialogue; and as I believe Macklin's play to be little studied, and followed rather for malicious enjoyment than the proper attractions of the drama, I shall take the liberty to display, at some length, the literary merit it undoubtedly contains, although the work of a man whose youth seemed to promise anything rather than literary distinction.

Who has succeeded the veteran of the stage in the

description of the subservient enjoyment of the patron's courtesy or good-humour?

'Aw crouding, bustling, and pushing foremost intul the middle of the circle, and there waiting, watching, and striving to catch a look or a smile fra the great mon; which they meet wi' an amicable reesibility of aspect—a modest cadence of body, and a conciliating co-operation of the whole mon.'

Hogarth never exceeded the painting of these finely chosen epithets.

When our Northern adventurer had settled the best means of his advancement to be a matrimonial adventure, and 'beauty often struck his e'en, and played about his heart,' when he had resolved to leave it however 'to prodigals and coxcombs that could afford to pay for it,' observe what he sought for in its stead, not from indifference or poverty of taste, but because he resolved to devote himself body and soul to his interest. 'I looked out for an ancient, weel-jointured, superannuated dowager; a consumptive, toothless, ptisicky, wealthy widow; or a shrivelled, cadaverous piece of deformity in the shape of an izzard, or an appersiand, or, in short, ainything, ainything that had the siller.'

Here, too, he takes an opportunity to enumerate rapidly the consolatory expedients which fanaticism offers to such neglected commodities in affected purity and spiritual prerogatives. 'Now, Sir, where do you think I ganged to look for this woman with the siller? Nai tul court, nai tul playhouses or assemblees. Nai, Sir. I ganged tul the kirk, tul the Anabaptist, Independent, Bradlonian, and Muggletonian meetings; tul the morning and evening service of churches and chapels of ease, and tul the midnight, melting, conciliating love-feasts of the Methodists.'

There he meets with the object of his passion; and notice, full as he is in his description above of what he sought, how copious he is in his terms, and how little he repeats himself. He meets with a 'slighted, antiquated, musty maiden, that was religiously angry with herself and aw the world, and had nai comfort but in metaphysical visions and supernatural deliriums.' When he found she had the siller, how happily he paints his conformity with

her practice! 'I plumpt me down upon my knees, close by her, cheek by jowl. I watcht her motions, handed her tul her chair, waited on her home, got most religiously intimate with her in a week, married her in a fortnight, buried her in a month, toucht the siller.'

What follows in the advancement of this systematic votary of fortune is in the same caustic style. Every hearer recognises the truth of the portrait, and admits the character to be contemptible; but as we shrink less from the principles than their avowal, the application of them to our particular objects admits of a thousand varieties, and the course of Macsycophant is often pursued under the mask of a steady prudence, which conceals from others, and sometimes from itself, the value of the sacrifices it is in the habit of making.

I find only one slight indication as to the period of Macklin's life when he commenced this comedy, and that is the song with a line of which his gay nobleman makes his exit—'Sons of care, 'twas made for you.' Dr. Dalton, in the year 1738, I think, brought Milton's *Comus* upon the stage, and the words quoted were then, for the first time, taken from the speech of Comus and set to music. So that it is quite clear it could not have been the work of his youth, unless, as in speaking of the patriarchs, we are to call fifty the youth of Macklin. The scene between Lady Rodolpha and Egerton, which closes his third act, is, however, uncommonly sprightly.

The prejudices of Macklin, I have said, were those of his party. Lawyers, of consequence, are favoured with a double portion of his spleen. It is common to attack the pleader on the ground of his adoption of another man's interest, or what is genteelly styled the indiscriminate defence of right or wrong. The common inference may be that he who is not scrupulous as to the integrity of his client will be utterly regardless as to his own. Macklin represents a learned serjeant as thinking only of his seat in Parliament, and ready to betray his client if the enemy will only return him for the borough. This is vulgar obloquy.

Upon the aid which they unquestionably furnish to the

malevolence of our species, Macklin has written a sentence of uncommon force and point:—

'Why, my dear lord, it is their interest that aw mankind should be at variance; for disagreement is the very manure with which they enrich and fatten the land of litigation; and as they find that that constantly promotes the best crop, depend upon it, they will be always sure to lay it on as thick as they can.'

But he was not disinclined to lash the subserviency of another learned body, the clergy. 'Gin you are so very squeamish about bringing a lad and a lass together, or about doing sic a harmless innocent job for your patron, you will never rise in the Church.' This is the sentiment of Sir Pertinax, who is supposed to speak from no slight or superficial knowledge of the world. The author, however, has introduced a reverend personage who feels the useful dignity of his order, and answers the calumniator with striking propriety:—

'*Sir Per.* You have been in my service for many years, and I never knew your principles before.'

'*Sid.* Sir, you never affronted them before.'

There is frequently a gross error in the language of a bad character, namely, that in speaking of his actions he uses the opprobrious terms with which others commonly mark them. This should be strenuously avoided. It is right for a friend to say, 'Take care how you get into the clutches of the merciless Sir Pertinax.' It is wrong for Macsycophant to speak thus of himself:—

'*Sir Per.* The devil a baubee he has in the world but what comes thro' these clutches.'

The veteran has not given all the interest to the scene that was naturally attached to his fable. He has made nothing of Constantia, though there were fine opportunities in the display of virtuous poverty, and a pathos as to the situation of her father which would have elevated the tone of his production. Still, in this case, as in others, it is easier to improve the defective parts of the structure than to conceive or execute the perfect. At the distance of

more than forty years from its production, the minds of our dramatic authors have yet produced no character that can stand against Macklin's Sycophant; and his Lady Rodolpha, though but slightly involved in his business, is so happily marked with peculiar humour, that she is equally removed from rivalry among the later candidates for the honours of comedy.

I have noticed the Whiggism of Macklin. It is a little remarkable that his friend Murphy, when he wrote or corrected for him the dedication of his play and farce to Lord Camden in 1792, fell quite naturally into the doctrine of Lord Chatham and Junius. The following paragraph is remarkable for its expression:—

'When the Libel Bill was depending in Parliament I know who was the orator in the cause of the people and the Constitution. By that bill, which, with your Lordship's support, has happily passed into a law, I saw it determined that, when a jury is sworn to try the matters in issue, craft and chicane are no longer to teach twelve men to perjure themselves by resigning the chief part of their duty to the discretion of the court, which has been emphatically called the law of tyrants.'

The reader sees the reference here made to the attempt of Lord Mansfield to restrict a jury to the finding of special facts, such as printing and publishing; and that the innuendos, whether of blanks or construction, were properly filled up in the information. Junius had sketched the paragraph for Macklin in the following terms:—'But that whether the defendant had committed a crime or not, was no matter of consideration to twelve men, who yet, upon their oaths, were to pronounce their peer guilty or not guilty.'

While we are thus apprehensive of the subserviency of the bench, and dread that some unhappy libeller of authority should meet the punishment he has provoked, let us not be indifferent to the reverence which juries may possess for the law, and the facility afforded by a general verdict of acquitting a criminal from the participation of his opinions.

CHAPTER VIII

THE summer season of the Haymarket Theatre had not produced anything of moment in 1781. That elegant and most accomplished woman, Lady Craven, had, by a modern anecdote, supplied Miles Peter Andrews with the subject of a musical comedy, of which the joke was in the title, the Baron Kinkvervankotsdorsprakengatchdern. Perhaps the château of Cunegonde invited the fair anecdote writer to this attempt; and *Franzel's Love* has been preserved from oblivion by Hayley's delightful *Triumphs of Temper*. But Andrews, as a dramatist, could only obtain oblivion through the regions of disgrace. Either alone, or combined with another, he was incessantly before the public as a writer of comedy, opera, or farce. Fashionably connected, he had the usual support of fashion, which pays a first visit of compliment and curiosity, and afterwards is equally prepared to enjoy either your triumph or disgrace.

But the dramatic honours of the noble lady just mentioned bloomed only in private theatricals. On the public stage, I think, her *Silver Tankard* did not pass round with great admiration; its second title, the *Point at Portsmouth*, introduced some unlucky associations. It is now forgotten, like her *Sleep-walker*, or rather that of Madame du Deffand's friend, Pont de Vesle. The *Miniature Picture*, I believe, is remembered most by its having first exercised Sheridan's famous prologue, which, suitable enough to the modern life of Lady Craven's pencil, was for its wit selected to precede the savage horrors of *Pizarro*. Colman's season had some permanent novelties—the *Beggar's Opera* reversed—and a *Medea and Jason à faire*

rire, with the *Agreeable Surprise* of O'Keefe, destined to a farcical immortality.

In commencing the winter season of 1781-2 it may be necessary to notice with some care the features of the rival management of the two theatres; as a mighty change indeed was at hand, which compensated to one of them all the mischiefs of indifference and idleness. Mr. Sheridan, as a dramatic writer, had opened with remarkable brilliancy. There was in *The Rivals*, properly estimated, enough to announce a genius of infinite humour, as well as delicacy. This comedy seems to have started from his personal feelings: Falkland expresses, I have no doubt, the captious alarms of the author's own passion for Miss Linley; and his memorable duel with Mathews, with all its inveterate animosity, by time admitted the play of fancy, and the strong contrast of Sir Lucius and Acres. The character of Sir Lucius O'Trigger is so happily conceived that one would hardly suppose it could be otherwise than attractive in any hands; yet when Lee acted it in 1775 he absolutely rendered him ridiculous and disgusting. He, however, was happily succeeded by Clinch, who perhaps gave the tone to all the subsequent impersonations. Some judicious curtailments too came in aid—the 'ineffectual good qualities' of Mrs. Malaprop became quite efficient, and the audience at length rose to the level of the comedy. *The Duenna* did not oblige them to rise at all; it was calculated to move all ranks with irresistible pleasantry, and situations comic in the highest degree. The author's wit here distinguished him from every existing competitor. Of Isaac Mendoza, who had quitted Judaism six weeks only, he says:—'He stands like a dead wall between church and synagogue, or like the blank leaves between the Old and New Testament.'

When Jerome had said of his daughter that she had 'the family face,' Isaac, who has seen the Duenna only, thus pleasantly comments upon the expression, aside:—

'Yes, egad, I should have taken it for a family face, and one that has been in the family some time too.'

Father Paul, in the third act, is complimented as looking the very priest of Hymen. He replies, 'In short, I may

be called so; for I deal in repentance and mortification.' To points such as these, in no scanty measure, may properly be added the very best comic song that the stage has yet heard—Don Jerome's 'O the days when I was young.' The mixture of whim and regret in the old voluptuary is quite delightful—

> 'True, at length my vigour 's flown,
> I have years to bring decay;
> Few the locks that now I own,
> And the few I have are grey.'

The School for Scandal and *The Critic* seemed to prove that his powers of every sort were acquiring still higher excellence as they proceeded in their course; but politics, selfish and vulgar and barren as they are, seized and engrossed this genuine son of the Muses, and all the hints or fragments of the *Foresters* and *Affectation*, a thousand bright ideas that had filled his mind, fled with the passing clouds, and left not a rack behind them.

In the meantime this brilliant light in his theatre, while it rendered other writers alarmed at either the judgment of Sheridan or his rivalry, had such an effect upon the comedians that they almost resembled Shakespeare's jealousy that 'mocks the meat it feeds on.' Novelty, however essential to them in their personal attraction, had but little of their respect. Who could write but their great master?

However it became at last sadly certain that his stage could not depend upon Sheridan; and his brother-in-law, Tickell, was tempted to do his best to fill the void. He revived *The Gentle Shepherd* of Allan Ramsay; and although some pains appear to have been taken to restore the genuine Doric, which Theophilus Cibber had translated into his own vulgar tongue, I yet cannot greatly commend the Southern dialect of Drury Lane. The simple beauties of the poem were, however, felt on this occasion, and the lovers of rustic nature were obliged to Mr. Tickell for the restoration of its original language—the pronunciation, and still more the cadence, suffered, as might be expected, from diffidence and badness of ear. Linley, by skilful accom-

paniments to the Scottish melodies, showed how usefully science may be occupied on the ground of genius.

On the 17th of November Jephson's *Count of Narbonne* was acted for the first time at Covent Garden Theatre. His friend, the Right Honourable Luke Gardiner, honoured him with a prologue, highly philosophical, and of a pure poetical vein. The subject of this play is one of those 'removed by sacred time's mysterious hand,' and is known to all readers as *The Castle of Otranto*, written by Horace Walpole, whom Mr. Gardiner gracefully mentions as neglecting in his retirement the wreaths of fame—

> 'And, more than poet, shuns a poet's name.'

He bespeaks the favour of the moderns to a Gothic play, on the principle that bids the modern mansion rise not unfrequently with 'fretted roof' and 'pointed turrets,' in imitation of the temples and the castles of our forefathers.

Distance from the subject, he says, is necessary to derive the proper enjoyment from the drama. This position he thus illustrates :—

> 'What odours the Arabian coasts dispense!
> Which, breath'd too near, o'erpower and pall the sense;
> But if at sea the breeze their sweets exhale,
> Vigour and life ride on the perfum'd gale.'

The introduction of the trochee, in the first and third feet of the last line, give indeed expressive vigour and life to the poetical figure, which suggests its mighty original, Milton :—

> 'Sabæan odours from the spicy shore
> Of Araby the blest; and, many a league,
> Cheer'd with the grateful smell old Ocean smiles.'

The author of the play seems rather to have rejected the peculiar marvellous of the romance than the marvellous altogether; for the address of the Countess to her husband seems to imply events of a nature equally surprising. He destroys their son by a Barbary horse instead of a gigantic helmet; but the language of Hortensia points more immediately to the latter species of interference :—

'Spectres glide,
Gibbering and pointing as we pass along;
These towers shake round us, though the untroubled air
Stagnates to lethargy.'

The features of the Gothic romance never bend to modern philosophy without losing much of their picture power, and all their sublimity. It is true that the stage may be unable to exhibit its terrors adequately; but if a catastrophe be mere matter of narration, a credence of the marvellous is never refused to the seeming earnestness and conviction of the relater. As far, too, as the human passions are concerned, the superstitions of a dark age extenuate in a degree the peculiar atrocities to which they sometimes conduct. All the accompaniments should bear the impress of the century in which we lay the action. The modern spectator, for his own enjoyment, will surrender his knowledge to his imagination, and, with the excellent Collins,

'Hold each strange tale devoutly true.'

As Jephson is one of the moderns who may pretend to tragic diction, a few observations upon the language of *The Count of Narbonne* will be expected. He sometimes transfers a happy combination from Shakespeare *sans façon*. Thus we have, at page 9 of his play, 'scanted courtesy' from *King Lear*; and, at page 16, the following bold attempt to use the terrific expressions of Gloster's death-bed:—

'Methinks I see him,
His ashy hue, his grizzled, bristling hair,
His palms spread wide.'
(See the 3rd Act of Shakespeare's *Second Part of Henry VI.*)

We sometimes perceive the deep impression of a favourite author looking out unconsciously in a passage of a very different kind. The famous soliloquy of Cato has these expressions:—

'The soul secured in her existence—
What means this heaviness?'

So in the two following speeches of Jephson's 1st Act:—

'*Peasant.* Secure in her integrity my soul—
Count. Away with him—What means this heaviness?'

So sure is this doctrine of association to operate upon composition, felt or unfelt.

He occasionally is verbose and flimsy—

> 'With downcast eye and sad dejected mien.
> Once lighter than the airy wood-nymph's shade.'

His highest power, as it excites either awe or sorrow, will be found in the admirable character of Austin. The energy and pathos of Henderson here rendered all rivalry impossible. But the poet had supplied divine materials for the great artist to work up.

> '*Count.* You come commission'd from fair Isabel?
> *Austin.* I come commission'd from a greater Power,
> The Judge of thee, and Isabel, and all.
>
> * * * * *
>
> *Austin.* And think you to excuse
> A meditated wrong to excellence,
> By giving it acknowledgment and praise?'

The wretched Raymond, the victim of destiny, upon whom is entailed blood shed unrighteously, is for the most part an object of either horror or disgust. The cravings of ambition, and the dread of retribution, make him see even the virtues of others invidiously. His comment upon the inflexible honesty of Austin is admirable sarcasm.

> 'The virtue of our churchmen, like our wives,
> Should be obedient meekness. Proud resistance,
> Bandying high looks, a port erect and bold,
> Are from the canon of your order, priest.
> A front that taunts, a scanning, scornful brow,
> Are silent menaces, and blows unstruck.'

Raymond hurries at last into satirical invective against the sex, seldom indeed exceeded. The reader will find the passage, which I had rather not quote, because I would not supply arms to the scoffer and the idler.

> 'The frail and fair make you their oracles,' etc.

As an instance of the author's power of painting in language, the Countess Hortensia is thus alluded to:—

> 'And see, the beauteous sorrow moves this way.'

But enough as to a writer for whom my respect would

have been sufficiently secured by the friendship with which he was honoured by the late Mr. Malone.

When this play was first acted in Dublin it was extremely profitable to Daly; and Kemble greatly distinguished himself in the Count.

At the rival theatre the Crawfords paid similar respect to the muse of Ireland, who superintended the rehearsals, and had the exquisite gratification of occupying both theatres of the capital at the same time. Clinch played the Count, and Crawford Theodore. Mrs. Crawford, who should certainly, even from her age, have represented the Countess, to the astonishment of everything but dotage, threw away all the advantages of a part most powerfully written, and chose the virgin Adelaide, for the sole object of playing the youthful passion with her husband, the Theodore of the night.

It is not difficult to conceive that a young gentleman may be passionately enamoured of the great talents of a lady of middle age: it is still more easy to imagine the delusion under which the mature female strives to attach, and hopes to retain, the ardour which nature designed for beauty of its own age; but I must think such matches ill calculated for public display: the charm is known and felt only by the parties; the disproportion strikes all eyes but their own; a feeling of shame is excited in the beholders, which drops into disgust or rises into ridicule. When such exhibitions invade the stage, and the circumstances of the parties are known, the loves of the drama suffer from the absurd reality in the representation.

In London the cast of *The Count of Narbonne* had none of this absurdity. Wroughton was the Count, and his matronly Countess was Miss Younge. The innocent Adelaide found a delightful representative in Miss Satchell; and Lewis communicated to the seeming peasant, Theodore, the noble bearing of the heir of Clarinsal.

When the author of such a tragedy called upon the theatre for the profits of his three nights, he found them rather more than one hundred and fifty pounds: but if you will be merely poetical, manly, pathetic, and sublime in your writings, is a London audience to blame?

Whatever author produces a strong effect upon the public mind, no matter for the subject, will always find the doors of the playhouse open to a dramatic effort. Pratt, of Bath, who had written under the signature of Courtney Melmoth, in the year 1781, published a poem with the faint title of *Sympathy*. The rage for this *chef-d'œuvre* was excessive: so in truth was the sensibility which was the soul of the production. But although admired by Whalley, and Potter, and Hayley, and sanctioned by Beattie (worth all Bath-Easton together), at a distance of forty years the following lamentation for the loss of Shenstone seems extremely puerile :—

> 'The birds and beasts funereal honours paid,
> Mourn'd their lov'd lord and sought the desert shade;
> His gayest meads a serious habit wore;
> His larks would sing, his lambs would frisk no more.'

But all ranks then sympathised with the man who, going to a friend's seat in the country, finds him absent, and lets his heart out in such a flow of the social affections as to find no charm in the scenery which had pleased him most, and with excessive sensibility to feel a temporary absence like a death.

Dr. Johnson has treated with some derision the important axioms of *The Essay on Man*. The choice discoveries of Pope are resolved into the talk of the mother and the nurse. But whether it be obvious or not that

> 'Whatever is is right—'

there will be less hazard in affirming with Pratt,

> 'This then is clear, while human kind exist,
> The social principle must still subsist.'

It is an old rule in morals to suspect the possessor of ostentatious virtue. This tearful romancer had been in orders and thrown aside his gown; he had also invaded the stage as an actor, and the buskin dropped from him. Sympathy, however, brought his *Fair Circassian* upon the stage, and it had such a tender interest as Miss Farren was strong enough to give it.

The subject was the *Almoran and Hamet* of Dr. Hawkesworth, a writer formed for the Eastern romance, and emulating the lofty periods of Johnson. I have commonly observed the effect of characters towering above the species, either in virtue or wisdom, cold upon the stage. The highest wisdom is passion subdued or absent. Our interest is excited by the interest of others, and, if we are touched by their passions, we find the text of nature sufficient without the lecture of the philosopher.

It was the practice of Shakespeare to build upon the current tales of romance; but those tales abounded in incident, and were therefore suited to the stage. He could himself work out character, and inform it with passion and with sentiment. As literature rose upon us, a more artful rhetoric embellished our inventions: we became ambitious of swelling thoughts and sounding language. We invented draperies instead of involving man in new or striking circumstances. An allegory offered much to the ear but little to the eye. For every dramatic purpose the homely fables which diverted the halls of our ancestors far surpass the elegancies of modern narrative.

The object of this slight disquisition is to show that Pratt had in reality to struggle with materials that seemed at first so captivating, and that incidents more level with humanity would have given him less trouble to dramatise, and have produced infinitely greater effect: it is not, however, intended to affirm that any other dramatist could have surpassed, on this occasion, Mr. Pratt.

In society Pratt was a lecturer and reader of his own productions; full of himself, and coveting that distinction which the French, on juster grounds, bestowed upon l'Abbé de Lille. In English society the separation of the sexes, absurd even to a resemblance of the forest, drove Pratt for the most part to the dowager division of life; and he cherished a general sensibility without distinct objects. Pratt was a delightful man to women whom others had disgusted, or injured, or neglected.

Tickell, on the 13th of December, in pursuance of his design, brought out his opera of *The Carnival*. I saw it at the time and considered it amusing, though not striking.

Compared with *The Duenna* it was flat—Lent rather than Carnival.

Music at this time lost more, much more, than *The Carnival*, however tuneful, could possibly supply. The learned, the elegant, the tender Bach died on the 21st of January, 1782, and, on the 19th of the March following, that admirable comic singer Joseph Vernon. The exhilaration of Vernon was peculiar; his look was an invitation to be happy, and his voice, though weak, sufficed to convey the effect of both the words and music of his songs. His style was full of meaning, and he left no pupils that ever reminded you of his excellence. For years he was the delight of the public, and communicated dignity even to the Vauxhall muse.

A principle of association leads me here to notice a severe loss appertaining to a sister art—Painting. The Government of the country having had its attention engrossed by a long and unnatural struggle, about this time the magnificent collection of art at Houghton was transferred to the Empress of Russia for the sum of £40,825. It is gratifying to know that so superior is the present condition of this country, that after a war to which that of America was but a prologue, the tragic drama closed upon us with resources so vast that we should have voted the sum in Parliament with acclamation that was to keep such a treasure among us. I shall risk, as a divertissement, a small selection of the greater works, with the prices given for them by the Empress.

The Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin, by Guido Pope Innocent the XIIIth, after this beautiful picture had been shipped at Civita Vecchia, could hardly be persuaded to permit the vessel to depart.	£3500
A Holy Family, by Vandyke	1600
The Magdalen Washing the Saviour's Feet, by Rubens	1600
A Sea-port and Calm Sea, by Claude	1200
Four Markets—Fowl, Fish, Fruit, Herbs—by Snyders	1000
Two Flower Pieces, by Van Huysum	1200
Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, by Pietro Cortona	1000
A Holy Family, life size, by Nicolo Poussin	800
Moses Striking the Rock, by the same	900
A Cook Shop, by Teniers	800
Christ Baptized by St. John, by Albano	700
Assumption of the Virgin, by Murillo	700

The Adoration of the Shepherds, by Murillo	£600
Bathsheba, by Vanderwerf	700
The Prodigal Son, by Salvator Rosa	700
The Continence of Scipio, by Nicolo Poussin	600
Six Sketches of Triumphal Arches, by Rubens	600
The Wife of Rubens, by Vandyke	600
Charles the First and Henrietta, whole lengths, by Vandyke	400
Judgment of Paris, by Luca Jordano, etc.	500

But it is perfectly distressing to copy the sad detail, and to consider at the same time what prices would be given now to recover the pictures.

The best comic efforts of the season were the *Which is the Man* of Mrs. Cowley, and *The Walloons* of Mr. Cumberland; but both those agreeable writers had produced much better plays, and they had only a temporary effect:

> 'The perfume and suppliance of a minute,
> No more.'

The Maid of the Oaks, reduced to a farce, now was acted at Drury Lane Theatre, and Lady Bab Lardoon's pleasantries, from the lips of Mrs. Abington, were no vulgar enjoyment. I remember the salt with which she seasoned her fine gentleman's claim to be as loving as sparrows:—

'*Lady Bab.* I know you are very loving—of yourselves; ha, ha, ha! You are a sort of birds that flock, but never pair.'

The way in which, as Philly Nettletop, she mystified Dupeley, was in truth perfection; but the scene, as Garrick saw from the first, had genuine comedy in every line of it. Burgoyne is the only writer of our country who has done what I think justice to the comic genius of France. 'We must turn to France,' says he, 'to find the graces of the Apollo. Art, regularity, elegance, delicacy, touches of sentiment, adapted only to the most polished manners, distinguish their theatre.'

Place yourself as you may in the world, there is always an antipodes. While the above *fête champêtre* was cutting down to a farce for Drury, *The London Cuckolds*, that detestable oglio by Ravenscroft, was enduring the knife at Covent Garden. The amputation was attended by a decided morti-

fication in the subject, and a speedy death delivered the now polished lord mayoralty of the city from even the chance of a scandalous insult on the 9th of every November.

Although it is not common to register the attempts made by the actors to strengthen their benefit nights, yet the first appearance of *Don John*, the libertine of Corneille and Moliere, in the ballet form, was the attraction of Miss Stageldoir at Drury Lane Theatre, on the 10th of May 1782. This piece is actually of the most ancient class of the drama. It is a genuine mystery or morality. Wickedness suffered to blast the innocence and happiness of others through a life of riot; with a righteous conveyance to hell in the last instance, and at least no visible atonement to the victims of his passions. Rude and inartificial as such a fable is, Don John has been applauded upon every stage in Europe. Gaping wonder shudders at his fate, but perhaps enjoys the triumphs which lead to it.

An attempt was once made to divest the subject of its horrors; but it was for a private exhibition. The elegant Lady Craven, in the summer of 1782, constructed a theatre in the wood behind his Lordship's seat at Newbury, and the Libertine was thus acted by her young family. Don John is gay and unthinking, not villainous. His wife, Elvira, has an ingenious brother, who becomes the statue to terrify and reclaim the Libertine. These *amusements de famille*, however, may be excused if they leave the savage terrors of the drama to public stages and less refined spectators. Her children thus perhaps commenced that love for the stage which has distinguished them through life. The prologue, written, I believe, by Lady Craven, had a graceful and gentle beauty admirably suited to the occasion.

> 'No more the hoarse and death-foreboding raven
> With croaks disturbs the peaceful house of Craven;
> A muse with all a mortal's careless grace
> First decks with artful hand this lovely place;
> Here fixes all the objects of her love,
> And with a smile now consecrates the grove.'

Her ladyship had nearly re-written Moliere's *Festin de Pierre*, and, however inferior the effort, one is gratified by any approach to the domestic amusements of Ludlow Castle.

I may be permitted one incidental remark upon the prevalence in former times of these exhibitions. It was the policy (why should I not call it the virtue ?) of our ancestors to make the parental character stand high; to lift it into a grand and reverential position, from which its tenderness and its condescension were felt for the most part to be the true earthly image of the great Parent of all. In high life the lady mother became well decorated with the attributes which poetry had abused upon Pagan divinities, and the persons who composed her court joyed to behold her in all the splendours of her rank, receiving the homage of her family, and rewarding with her smile their juvenile attempts for her entertainment. Listen to the expiring feudality of Milton, for the Countess Dowager of Derby at Harefield.

> 'Mark what radiant state she spreads
> In circle round her shining throne,
> Shooting her beams like silver threads;
> This, this is she alone,
> Sitting like a goddess bright
> In the centre of her light.'

That the poet who had supplied the shades of Harefield and Ludlow with designs so exquisite, and who probably assisted at the festivals among the families of Derby and Bridgewater, could stoop to the vulgar taste of Cromwell, and the mystic ravings of Puritanism, is one of the most difficult problems in the mental science.

At the Haymarket Theatre this season Mr. Colman revived, with the deep interest which formerly attended it, *The Fatal Curiosity* of Lillo. For many years we used to listen to the pathos of his *Barnwell*, and imagine its moral effect upon the rising generation; but the times are altered, and men are altered with them; the Barnwells are disclaimed by their fashionable successors, who practise the same vices upon a higher scale, and from other motives. The former drudge of a counting-house has now more time to devote to his amusements, and apes the luxuries of his master. He covets the shooting-box in the country, and the smart vehicle on the road; has little to impel him but vanity, and his Milwood is the choice of ostentation rather than of passion.

When Lillo brought out his *Fatal Curiosity* in 1736, Fielding was the manager of 'the little theatre' whose fortune it has been to have always had managers who knew when genius stood before them. He received Lillo with open arms, promised him the fullest extent of his humble means, wrote a prologue to introduce his play, and gave him all the benefit of his dramatic experience. Of human nature, I am convinced, Lillo was as profound a student as even the author of Tom Jones. A contemporary described him at rehearsal with a valuable minuteness. 'Plain and simple as he was in his address, his manner of conversing was modest, affable, and engaging. When invited to give his opinion how a particular sentiment should be uttered by the actor, he expressed himself in the gentlest and most obliging terms, and conveyed instruction and conviction with good-nature and good manners.'

Two lessons are taught by this play: the one of general, the other of but occasional, importance. The first, 'that no human virtue is superior to all temptation,' the other, that 'concealment, for a moment even, should not be practised in the presence of poverty and despair.' Young Wilmot intended to surprise his parents with his wealth and their deliverance, on awaking from his slumber. They see his opulence, and do not suspect his affinity; the father uses the very dagger of his son, who just awakes to recognise the person of his murderer.

Such is the terrible interest of *The Fatal Curiosity*. I do not wonder that it met with little favour; it is written with a power that sometimes approaches the magic diction of Shakespeare, but for the most contents itself with the weaker purity of Fletcher. The savage nature of the piece is but little calculated for summer amusement. The moral forces need their relaxations as well as the corporeal, and winter only can steel the nerves to the endurance of such severe attacks upon them.

I have seen two great performers of old Wilmot in my time—Bensley and Henderson. The discrimination between them seemed to be this: that the act excited less surprise from Bensley, and the sympathy for him was therefore less; but he was terrible and even sublime. Henderson

had our love from his first line, and the distress was perhaps greater that so noble a nature should be thus ensnared to his perdition, and even that the piety and glowing hopes of his virtuous son should become the prey of poverty and desperation. The style of *Fatal Curiosity* is swelling, perhaps, beyond the rank of the characters; Bensley, by his formal declamation, carried this still higher. Henderson's, more level with life, somewhat sunk upon us this error of the author; it still never crept into prose, but seemed only language forcibly natural.

Lillo, like many other authors, shadows his own nature mysteriously in the characters of his plays. He had a tendency to trick and concealment. He once affected to want to borrow and yet refused security. His nephew suspected, it is said, his real circumstances, and supplied the humorist upon his own terms; it secured to him the bulk of his uncle's fortune.

About this time Miss Burney, who had deeply interested the reading world by her two novels of *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, conceived that the drama was likely to afford her an easy accession of fame and fortune. Her dialogue, as exhibited in her narratives, whether serious or ludicrous, seemed so truly characteristic, and her persons so correctly drawn, that to produce her views of life upon the stage appeared only a more succinct form given to one common power.

But I have remarked that, however excellent the materials which the novelist affords to the dramatic writer, the habit of composing the longer work is somewhat unfriendly to great celebrity in the shorter, and the inventor of the subject does not usually best dress it for the theatre. The habit of expanding a fable through from three to five ample volumes, as it allows character to be gradually unfolded, impresses it with fuller effects: the comedies of the novelist are commonly weak and heavy; there is too little business and too much conversation, and a very admirable painter of the manners is guilty of an indifferent play.

The dramatic author has only at most five short acts to display all the peculiarities in his characters, however diversified in what our forefathers called their humours. Here he has great aid, it is true, in the admirable skill of his actors,

who, from the possession they take of a part, or allow the part to take of them, in the first word they utter convey 'a whole history,' and by their dress and action place the living being absolutely before you. The fable, however, neither abruptly nor languidly, must be completely developed and concluded in the short compass of eighty or a hundred pages, and yet such is the nature of dramatic effect that frequently, indeed, the last act is lingered out by expedients often perilous, and always tiresome.

Something of this kind, I remember, was observed in *The East Indian*, the ground of which was essentially novel and but little dramatic. Miss Burney claims more than the usual notice of a play not eminently successful. An East Indian falls in love with the daughter of his guardian; but, although favoured by the young lady, leaves her on his return to India unfettered by any engagement. The comedy opens with his revisit to this country. In the absence of one lover, a second, it appears, presented himself, a gallant colonel in the service, to advance whose suit an ingenious friend of his practises a stratagem upon the lovers. The East Indian is told on his arrival that his mistress is going to marry the colonel, and the lady is informed that her nabob is engaged to a rich Eastern temptation. This disingenuous fallacy is completely detected in the third act, and the interest is there completed, though the play continues through two more acts of mere supererogation.

What is extraneous is of the novel cast also—Savage, a character of morbid sensibility, always ready at the call of benevolence; a poor but proud family, such as her novels had exhibited, and a common plague, in one of those importunate beings who force their advice upon every living thing that comes within their sphere of action. The effect of all this was but weak, though the language of the piece was delightful. Bensley distinguished himself in Savage, and Mrs. Inchbald rather surprised the audience in the performance of the heroine. Curtailments improved its effect, but it never became popular. For once Mr. Colman failed in a prologue. The title of the play was thought to justify the introduction of that jargon which should be confined entirely to Leadenhall Street; but when he talked

of 'crores of humour and a lack of wit,' he forgot that the word crore had no secondary sense to support the pun by which his wit was attended.

The reader may not be displeased to review now one of those performances which in the winter theatres commonly take place during the summer. I mean those periodical attainments of every possible improvement from the skill of the architect. The Theatre, Covent Garden, had, with some slight changes, stood its ground fifty years; the foundations were laid in the year 1729, and as in that period the art magic did not associate itself with architecture, the house was completed in about four years, and opened in 1733 with the opera of *Achilles*, written by Gay.

Theatres for a long time retained the form which accident had bestowed upon them, and the temporary stage erected across the entrance part of a common inn-yard, with the wooden galleries on three sides of an area, occupied itself as a pit, taken together, are a rude resemblance of the building which the greatest architects of Europe appropriated to the drama. How it happened that they resisted all the laws of perspective, and buried a great part of the spectators in back seats and angles where it was impossible they should see the stage, I know not. Perhaps Smollett's opinion as to circular buildings might not be singular, though Sterne has laughed at his description of the Pantheon. ''Tis nothing but a huge cock-pit,' said he. What he does say of it is this: 'I was much disappointed at sight of the Pantheon, which, after all that has been said of it, looks like a huge cock-pit open at the top. With all my veneration for the ancients I cannot see in what the beauty of the rotunda consists. It is no more than a plain, unpierced cylinder, or circular wall, with two fillets and a cornice, having a vaulted roof or cupola open in the centre.' A smile is excited by the 'no more' of this definition when it is remembered that simplicity is a leading principle of either beauty or sublimity, and that a multitude of small elaborated parts would have stolen away the 'very life of the building.' Akenside as a poet had other and perhaps juster notions of this edifice, which, with Agrippa's addition, the noble portico, is now repeating in our capital for 'less

than gods,' and will exhibit London itself in all its magnificent extent.

> 'Mark, how the dread Pantheon stands,
> Amid the domes of modern hands:
> Amid the toys of idle state,
> How simply, how severely great!'
>
> *Ode to Lord Huntingdon.*

Mr. Harris had determined to rebuild the interior of this theatre, and Richards, who was his principal architect, still keeping on the sides to the straight lines of the old house, threw the front boxes and galleries into segments of circles; and by raising his roof afforded himself an elevation of his seats which restored numbers to the use of their sight as to the amusements of the stage. The architect, however, loaded his fronts with Corinthian columns and their gilt flutings and ornaments; but, however magnificent these obvious but not necessary supporters, they, in dividing the boxes, intercepted the sight, and the comfort of palpable stability was bought too dearly. Still, when I recall the impression made upon me by this, which was called the New Theatre, Covent Garden, it passes before my mind's eye with a character of solid grandeur.

I well remember the effect of its additional boxes in the situation of the old stage-doors, and that these essential things in the new structure were behind the curtain. The actors seemed to feel embarrassed by the more extended area of the stage. There was no springing off with the established glance at the pit and projected right arm. The actor was obliged to edge away in his retreat towards the far distant wings with somewhat of the tedium, but not all the awkwardness, which is observed in the exits at the Italian Opera.

CHAPTER IX

THE most important season that the Theatre has, perhaps, ever known was that of 1782-3. The winter before Mrs. Siddons had accepted an engagement for three years, and her immense popularity at Bath might have led the proprietors at Drury Lane Theatre to use her name as the herald of their hopes; but their opening turned upon quite a different matter, and the public were invited to applaud the nomination of Mr. King to succeed Mr. Sheridan in the management of the stage.

Garrick, after any occasional absence, had taken the usual licence of vanity to imagine what all the ranks of life would think and say upon the return of their idol. He could thus judiciously, however vainly, suggest topics of applause to his admirers, and disarm his enemies by some affected censures of himself and his motives. But Garrick was a mighty power, and the lesson could be safely followed by only similar attraction. King was a very good, but a confined, actor; and, whatever talents he might possess for management, the public was ere long to know, from his own distinct avowal, that he could neither encourage authors nor engage actors, nor even refresh the dingy fabric of a thread-bare suit with a few yards of copper lace.

However, in imitation of his great master, he turned himself to compose an address on the occasion to his audience; and spoke, awkwardly enough, between the first and second acts of *The Clandestine Marriage*, an olio, part parody, part doggerel, of which he was both the subject and the organ. Stage invention is commonly at so low an ebb that hardly any reader requires to be told that the passage selected for parody was the address of Othello to the senators of Venice.

But when he arrived at the words in which Othello disclaims the artificial eloquence of the sons of peace, Mr. King's taste was bad enough to venture this wretched substitution—

'Queer am I in speech,
And little bless'd with the set phrase of blank verse.'

A line which proves that fact to a nicety, being, in truth, no verse at all. It was not so much a trifle (for trifles may be elegant) as vulgar trifling throughout; but it was applauded even beyond the delightful creation of Lord Ogleby, which followed it, and which King acted with the most consummate skill.

Covent Garden was unlucky in its prelude. Though the prompter and his friend found no difficulty in proving the comfort and splendour of the new building, yet a club of disappointed authors was too illiberal for human endurance. These truly unhappy persons were of various nations, English, Scotch, Welsh, Irish, and French. With the usual outrageous and fulsome compliment, the Irishman is the only being among them who has either generosity or justice. For once the verdict of the audience spoke in the proper rebuke of this shameless flattery.

The manager of this theatre had not heard with indifference the notice of the appearance at Drury Lane of the great genius of Tragedy. He had engaged Mrs. Yates, who, it was expected, might stand at least in some few characters against the Bath heroine; and he had Miss Younge, admirable either as a first or second in tragedies which displayed two important female parts. He had been some time negotiating with Mrs. Abington, who had quitted the other house because she could not obtain an increase of emoluments amounting to about a thousand pounds during the season. Admirable, it is true, she was, but excessively capricious; and neither manager considered her attraction at this time at all equivalent to the engagement she demanded. Drury Lane had set up Miss Farren as the Lady Teazle in *The School for Scandal*, and she acted that character for the first time on the 26th of September, 1782. In either the sparkling vivacity of youth exposing the foibles of life, fashionable or rustic, or the heart-struck repentance of a generous spirit,

alarmed from a dream of delusive, perhaps ruinous indulgence, Mrs. Abington was not hastily to be supplanted. Miss Farren was also the Lady Betty Modish in succession, and for about one-half of her business she was a beautiful and interesting substitute. Time at length restored and new dressed the other half in the person of Mrs. Jordan. Mrs. Bulkeley replaced at Drury Lane much of the comedy in which Miss Younge was so excellent. Her figure allowed her to assume the male habit; she was a fine dancer and always graceful; a sensible and even forcible speaker, but she did not charm. When I revive the actresses of that time, I may be allowed to say that she had the most merit among those hastily forgotten. Mrs. Ward, notwithstanding the family name, had no sort of alliance in tragedy to Mrs. Siddons.

From the time that our great tragedian had quitted the metropolis, her professional course had been well directed. Younger, Wilkinson, and Palmer were her managers; and in York the impression she left was highly gratifying to the judicious. I have before me the recollections of a most excellent critic, who preferred at that time her Euphrasia, Alicia, Rosalind, Matilda, and Lady Townley. It may hardly be suspected by the followers of her maturer efforts that one of her most applauded parts at Manchester was the character of Hamlet. I can imagine that Garrick, when he heard of it, repeated his accustomed 'Eh! that's bold. What! Hamlet the Dane?' I do not imagine on our larger stages, upon which the performer walks so much, that Mrs. Siddons was ever desired in that or any other male character; reading the play from the desk does not enable the most intelligent to conceive how the reader acted any one character. Yet I am so thoroughly imbued with a knowledge of the style of this astonishing artist, that I am apt to fancy the effort now before me; and, notwithstanding the consanguinity, see very clearly where and how she would differ from her brother, Mr. Kemble. The conception would be generally bolder and warmer, not so elaborate in speech, nor so systematically graceful in action. Where Horatio and the rest describe the appearance of the spectre, I should think the real feminine alarm at such mysterious

seeming would carry up the expression of countenance higher than it has perhaps ever illumined even the powerful features of Kemble. The 'Arm'd, say you?' the 'I'll watch to-night,' with an ardour that sunk the remaining day before it, were probably points amazingly impressive. As she heard a narrative at all times better than one was ever told, so I conceive her breathless attention to the spirit during his disclosure, again benefited by sex itself, would, as before, be transcendent. The famed soliloquy, 'To be, or not to be,' from the quality of her organ, would be more like audible rumination than Kemble's, who declaimed it in the higher tones of his voice, and lost the cast of thought that the galleries might catch the words he uttered. Perhaps a few more points might be safely affirmed in her favour, but the unconstrained motion would be wanting for the most part; modesty would be sometimes rather intractable in the male habit, and the conclusion at last might be, 'were she but man, she would exceed all that man has ever achieved in Hamlet.'

Undoubtedly Bath was a desirable station to Mrs. Siddons. Till the fashion follows the performer the performer must follow the fashion. Bath is a more select London. But the theatre for some time was sufficiently cool on the nights of its greatest ornament. Tragedy, although the most exalted delight of a refined nature, is seldom sought by those who are merely in search of amusement; when a rage is once excited it is followed, not for its object but its vogue. Palmer for a considerable time troubled Mrs. Siddons only on his Thursday nights, when the cotillion balls carried off every thing that could move to the Rooms; and that eye was frequently bent on vacancy that ere long was to fascinate all ranks and ages of life, and number the wisest and noblest of our country, not merely as patrons, but as friends.

On one of these devoted Thursdays accident is said to have conducted into the boxes of the theatre some persons of consummate taste, and of sufficient consequence to make their opinions heard. A mysterious smile of derision soon announced to the votaries of fashion that a great genius was wasting unequalled talents, without either patronage or praise, among people who call themselves enlightened.

Old Mr. Sheridan distinguished himself early in the list of admirers, and asserted, I have no doubt with exact truth, that Mrs. Siddons was more pathetic even than Mrs. Cibber. The prophecy of Henderson too was remembered, and the tide of popularity soon flowed in a stream which was never destined to ebb. A few eddies from occasional obstruction, to carry on the figure, hardly merit to be formally remembered.

The Thursday nights, from a vacuum, soon became a plenum; the charms of the cotillion itself were resisted, and no nights at all in the Bath Theatre were attended by the fashionable world but those on which Mrs. Siddons acted. One might have expected that the Bath manager would have felt the full value of his magnet, but he did not. I know from unquestionable authority that a not very considerable increase of salary would have kept her from the metropolis, probably for years, but he could not be induced to make the offer until it was too late. The fact was, seeing herself esteemed, and followed by the first people at Bath, the actress had completely acquiesced in her situation. To London she had a distaste from the experience of 1776, and nothing but the growing demands of her family at last decided her to remove. She summoned her friends to the theatre, and promised to submit to them her three reasons for quitting them and Bath.

Mrs. Siddons presumes the assembly to feel some astonishment that she should address them in verse of her own—she who had until then 'only with decency repeated the verses of others'—and fancies a considerable curiosity excited as to the object of her composition. She disclaims all vanity on this occasion, and mentions gratitude as the real inspirer of her poetry. At length her reasons for removal are displayed in the interesting forms of her three children.

> 'These are the moles that heave me from your side,
> Where I was rooted, where I could have died.'

The elegant speaker, their mother, is still living; but, reversing the order of existence, the children are no more; the two sisters but just matured the happiest and most delightful persons, and then dropped from the polished

sphere in which they moved; their brother survived them many years, and has left a family, who, I hope, possess the good qualities of their father. The elder sister was a musician of considerable science, and I seem at this moment to listen again to one of her compositions from Cowley.

At the opening of the season Mr. King, in addition to his olio, acted his best characters with sufficient applause: but I never knew but one rage after any performer of comedy. Mrs. Jordan alone filled her houses almost to fever heat. King therefore brought forward his great strength early in the season, and Mrs. Siddons acted *Isabella* for the first time in London on the 10th of October, 1782—that play had not been performed at Drury Lane for the last four years.

It may be proper to gratify curiosity with the cast of the play—not because it was excellent, for it was extremely commonplace in all but one character, the Villeroy of Palmer. Biron, Smith; The Count, Packer; Carlos, Farren; Belford, R. Palmer; Sampson, Wrighten; The Nurse, Mrs. Love. The afterpiece was a *A Trip to Scotland*, in which Parsons was the Griskin, and Mrs. Brereton supported the train of her future sister-in-law as Miss Griskin.

At the other theatre it was conceived that the tragedy of the new actress was best met by tragedy, and Voltaire's *Zara* was acted on the same night, the heroine by Miss Younge; Lusignan, Henderson; Osman, for the first time, by Wroughton. But the manager had no inducement to repeat it.

As the person of our great actress has undergone some change, and her features by time became stronger, I should find it difficult now to describe her accurately by memory as she stood before the audience on the night of the 10th of October. I am relieved from this difficulty by an account of her written at the time. I shall change only a few of the expressions then used, more from a feeling as to composition than alteration as to sentiment.

'There never, perhaps, was a better stage figure than that of Mrs Siddons. Her height was above the middle

size, but not at all inclined to the *embonpoint*. There is, notwithstanding, nothing sharp or angular in the frame; there is sufficient muscle to bestow a roundness upon the limbs, and her attitudes are, therefore, distinguished equally by energy and grace. The symmetry of her person is exact and captivating. Her face is peculiarly happy, the features being finely formed, though strong, and never for an instant seeming overcharged, like the Italian faces, nor coarse and unfeminine under whatever impulse. On the contrary, it is so thoroughly harmonised when quiescent, and so expressive when impassioned, that most people think her more beautiful than she is. So great, too, is the flexibility of her countenance, that the rapid transitions of passion are given with a variety and effect that never tire upon the eye. Her voice is naturally plaintive, and a tender melancholy in her level speaking denotes a being devoted to tragedy; yet this seemingly settled quality of voice becomes at will sonorous or piercing, overwhelms with rage, or, in its wild shriek, absolutely harrows up the soul. Her sorrow, too, is never childish; her lamentation has a dignity which belongs, I think, to no other woman; it claims your respect along with your tears. Her eye is brilliant and varying like the diamond; it is singularly well placed; 'it pries,' in Shakespeare's language, 'through the portal of the head,' and has every aid from brows flexible beyond all female parallel, contracting to disdain, or dilating with the emotions of sympathy or pity or anguish. Her memory is tenacious and exact, her articulation clear and distinct, her pronunciation systematic and refined.

'Nor has Nature been partially bountiful — she has endowed her with a quickness of conception and a strength of understanding equal to the proper use of such extraordinary gifts. So entirely is she mistress of herself, so collected, and so determined in gestures, tone, and manner, that she seldom errs, like other actors, because she doubts her power of comprehension. She studies her author attentively, conceives justly, and describes with a firm consciousness of propriety. She is sparing in her action, because English nature does not act much; but it is always proper, picturesque, graceful, and dignified; it arises immediately

from the sentiments and feeling, and is not seen to prepare itself before it begins. No studied trick or start can be predicted; no forced tremulation of the figure, where the vacancy of the eye declares the absence of passion, can be seen; no laborious strainings at false climax, in which the tired voice reiterates one high tone beyond which it cannot reach, is ever heard; no artificial heaving of the breasts, so disgusting when the affectation is perceptible; none of those arts by which the actress is seen, and not the character, can be found in Mrs. Siddons. So natural are her gradations and transitions, so classical and correct her speech and deportment, and so intensely interesting her voice, form, and features, that there is no conveying an idea of the pleasure she communicates by words. She must be seen to be known. What is still more delightful, she is an original; she copies no one, living or dead, but acts from Nature and herself.'

More than forty years had elapsed since the above general character of the actress was written; but after the utmost attention, and a long experience of her genius, becoming grander in its energies as Shakespeare called them forth, I consider the preceding to be a just portrait of her upon her return to that stage in 1782, which six years before had relinquished her assistance, and had seen nothing that approached the established merits of Mrs. Yates and Miss Younge. A respect for the discernment of eminent men may tempt one to the opinion that her excellencies had expanded greatly in the interval; but it should steadily be kept in view that Henderson had either prophetically pierced the veil of time, or she was very early indeed the prodigy that she was subsequently allowed to have become.

Let us, however, avoid decision upon this question, and examine what she displayed in 1782 as the representative of Southern's enchanting Isabella. Time had bestowed the tender dignity of the mother upon her beauty. As she came upon the stage with her son, followed by Villeroy, though desirous to avoid his suit, her step was considerate,

and her head declined slightly, her eye resting upon her son. The first impression having been deeply made by her exterior, the audience was soon struck by the melancholy sweetness with which the following exquisite passage came upon the ear—referring to Biron—

> 'O, I have heard all this;
> But must no more: the charmer is no more.
> My buried husband rises in the face
> Of my dear boy, and chides me for my stay.
> Canst thou forgive me, child?'

and her fair admirers were in tears as she questioned her son. No art ever surpassed the perfect cadence of the next allusion to him:

> 'Sorrow will overtake thy steps too soon;
> I should not hasten it.'

The passing bitterness of reflection upon her own state produced, as it subsided, a moral sympathy with others. As she knocks at the door of her father-in-law the following general remark reproves the degeneracy of the heart—

> 'Where is the charity that used to stand,
> In our forefathers' hospitable days,
> At great men's doors,
> Like the good angel of the family,
> With open arms taking the needy in,
> To feed and clothe, to comfort and relieve them?'

Southern had read Shakespeare with a soul perhaps as tender as his own. Lear in the same way, in his own miseries, remembers the sufferings of others—

> 'Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of the pitiless storm,' etc.
>
> 'Take physick, pomp;
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel.'

The interview with Count Baldwin, that chalky sideling personage, old Packer, was a good deal hurt by his insipid manner; but when he consents to provide for the child, on the condition that his mother never visits him, Mrs. Siddons burst forth with the peculiar wildness of a mother's impatience, and the whole house told her that she was irresistible.

'What! take him from me?—
No, we must never part; I live but in my child.'

The second act of *Isabella* is a masterpiece of growing interest. Isabella, hopeless as to relief, discovered ruminating upon her fate, and her child at play, unconscious of the pang which he excites. The two servants who had given her access to Baldwin sent to diminish her resources, or rather to starve with her—creditors pressing for payment—Villeroy generously engaging to satisfy their demands—the villain Carlos, urging her obligations to Villeroy and working her ruin through her gratitude—the melancholy consent to take a second husband—altogether compose an act so thoroughly in nature, and so powerfully written, that if Dryden, in his old age, really felt that truth in the drama which he had himself in vain attempted through life, he must have placed Southern, as the poet of the heart, greatly before all his contemporaries.[1] The scenes of trifling comedy by which he had disgraced his play were expunged by Mr. Garrick in the year 1758, and so easily were they removed from all the noble interest that they resembled a series of miserable and ludicrous prints placed by a child in some work of genius, and shaken out by the first reader who discovers the pollution. Southern, when he addressed his patron, Hammond, told him that the comedy in it was not essential; that it was against his own opinion, and merely complied with the taste of the town; for, said he, 'I think every reasonable man will and ought to govern in the pleasures he pays for.' The results of such a principle we are now enjoying to an

[1] On the authority of Mr. Fox, I call this power the highest excellence. But if it be, as I think it is, a position extended truly to the epic poet—as to the dramatic—there can be no doubt whatever; it is the heart of his mystery; and even character is less essential than pathos in the composition of tragedy. Mr. Fox thus expresses himself, in a letter to G. Wakefield, dated 13th April, 1801: 'The verses you refer to in the 5th *Æneid* are indeed delightful; indeed I think that sort of pathetic is Virgil's great excellence in the *Æneid*, and that in that way he surpasses all other poets of every age and nation, except, perhaps (and only perhaps) Shakespeare. It is on that account that I rank him so very high; for surely to excel in that style which speaks to the heart is the greatest of all excellence.'

Mr. Fox's politics I must leave to his party. But his mind had a purity, a tenderness, a taste beyond all such feeling; they ennobled the species, and were loved wherever they were known.

extent that only accuses the reasonable quality of the public. At its first appearance, through three acts of the play, the gaiety of Mrs. Bracegirdle might divide the house with Mrs. Barry. Betterton was her Villeroy, not her Biron. To return, however, to an Isabella greater than Mrs. Barry.

When I said that the second act of this play was perfect, I apply the term beyond the composition to the actress; she threw infinite variety into its hurry of emotions. I remember the following passages with delight:

> 'To find out hope, and only meet despair;
> His little sports have taken up his thoughts.'

Who besides her ever so spoke of play in the accents of wretchedness?

> 'Thinking will make me mad: why must I think,
> When no thought brings me comfort?'

On the arrival of the creditors the answer to the nurse's earnest inquiry—'What will you do, madam?'

> 'Do! nothing.'

And on the noise increasing—

> 'Hark, they are coming! Let the torrent roar;
> It can but overwhelm me in its fall.'

He who remembers that word 'nothing,' as Laertes has it, 'so much more than matter,' and recollects the position her eyebrows assumed, the action of her right arm, and the energy of her tone in the passage, 'Let the torrent roar,' may be assured that the greatest of tragedians then stood before him.

But less obtrusive, and yet of equal excellence, was the delicate alarm lest her devoted attachment to Biron should be undermined by virtues so essential to her safety, and even in her consent to become the wife of Villeroy entering a sort of protest against his best hopes; all this was given in so soothing a strain; the glance at the child to determine the sacrifice, and the final ratification with its

graceful compliment, demanded and received every human accomplishment to do justice to the poet:

> 'I give you all,—
> My hand; and would I had a heart to give!
> But, if it ever can return again,
> 'Tis wholly yours.'

The reader sees from the simplicity of the terms used—the common parlance of life—how essential it was that they should be sustained by a measured dignity of utterance, and a languid sensibility in deportment and expression.

The third act is a weak one, for Isabella has nothing to do in it but to sit and hear the epithalamium at an entertainment given by her husband in the exultation of his heart. In the second act Isabella had conditioned that she should not change the colour of her apparel. Villeroy gratefully perceives that she is in white when she enters the saloon—

> '*Isa.* Black might be ominous;
> I would not bring ill-luck along with me.'

Mrs. Siddons spoke this so as to conceal the absolute vulgarity of the notion and the expression of it. She affected this by calling upon that heaviness of the heart which could not be dispelled by any external change. Unlike Iphigenia, she seemed a conscious sacrifice.

In this scene of mere dumb show her deportment was inimitable. She closed the act with a melancholy foreboding that hung like night about her. A melancholy, which she calls sudden, 'bakes her blood'—and, as Shakespeare continues, makes it heavy, thick, —her 'mind, her harassed mind, is weary.'

Man is always striving to anticipate the future, and selects his indications sometimes from external nature, sometimes from the peculiar sadness or hilarity of his present feeling. Shakespeare, the interpreter of his kind, has given us both. In Romeo a deceiving spirit 'lifts him above the earth' on the eve of his greatest disaster—unwonted gloom precedes the anguish of Isabella.

With the fourth act of the play Biron arrives from his captivity. There is a beautiful use made by Southern of the tokens interchanged by lovers. The importance of a

ring is heightened with wonderful dexterity. In her greatest poverty, Isabella pulls from her finger one that Biron had given to her; it is all that remains of value in her possession, and she parts with it to sustain life, which only can be dearer. Her husband, arriving late, sends up to her the corresponding token, which cannot fail on every ground to excite the strongest emotion. It operates like a spell upon her—

> '*Isa.* I've heard of witches,' etc.
> 'Now I believe all possible. This ring,
> This little ring, with necromantic force,
> Has rais'd the ghost of pleasure to my fears
> Conjur'd the sense of honour, and of love,
> Into such shapes,—they fright me from myself.'

The diminutive becoming mighty, as she gave the word 'little,' followed by 'such shapes,' spoken with horrors teeming in the fancy, made the hearer start with an undefined perturbation—

> 'Biron died,—
> Died to my loss at Candy; there 's my hope.—
> O, do I live to hope that he died there?'

This jealousy of affection plunged into circumstances so disastrous, even as to a sentiment that dishonours the ruling passion, was delivered by Mrs. Siddons, as it was written by the author, with pathos that will never be excelled.

I wish it were in the power of the painter to fix every change of that living picture upon the canvas!—the courtesy while she cautiously examined the supposed stranger—the joy to observe no trace of Biron—the recognition of him—the stupor that weighed upon her countenance, while she sobbed out the mysterious communications previous to his retiring—the manner in which she occupied the stage during that dreadful soliloquy—Biron's return—the still more alarming exclamations of his wife till she leaves him in despair.

Everything here had a truth of tone and look and gesture to which all that I have ever seen in female art bore no comparison whatever. But until then so noble a figure and a countenance so expressive never stood before me.

The last act has some admirable contrivances of the poet. Isabella's distraction—attempt upon the life of Biron—Villeroy's return—the death of Biron—the full detection of Carlos—the raving of Isabella, and her death. But the laugh when she plunges the dagger into her bosom seemed to electrify the audience; and literally the greater part of the spectators were too ill themselves to use their hands in her applause. It was perfectly clear to those who had seen this great woman at Bath that she came to London, as Garrick's enemy, Quin, expressed himself, to found a new religion; and she came with the full inspiration of the Muse. She struck even prejudice with astonishment from the number of her requisites. So full a measure had never yet fallen to the lot of any one daughter of the stage. Mrs. Yates was majestic, Mrs. Crawford pathetic, Miss Younge enthusiastic; the voice of the first was melodious, that of the second harsh, that of the third tremulous. As to features, Mrs. Yates was after the antique, but she had little flexibility; Mrs. Crawford was even handsome, but the expression of her countenance was rather satirical; of Miss Younge, the features wanted prominence and relief, and the eye had little colour. Yet sensibility impressed her countenance, and lifted plainness into consequence and interest. In the style of action they differed considerably —Mrs. Yates studied to be graceful; Mrs. Crawford was vehement, and threw her arms out from side to side, struck the bosom with violence in the bursts of passion, and took all fair advantages of her personal attractions; Miss Younge had acquired the temperance in action which Shakespeare recommends, and in every motion was correct and refined, delicate and persuasive. Their rival had all that was valuable in their respective requisites, and more than all; her mental power seemed to be of a firmer texture, her studies to have been deeper, and partaking less of what may be termed professional habits. The eye of Mrs. Siddons was an inestimable distinction; no rival could pretend to look like her.

It is much to possess such an artist in any department of art. The public at large is refined by it. In the present case a fashion was excited that drew the attention of our

higher orders particularly to the stage. As we are so constituted as to be purified by terror and by pity, a great moral object was gained by stealing, through even their amusements, upon the hearts of the fairest portion of the species; and there where affluence had rendered many of the cares of life no subjects of either burden or thought, to banish the apathy engendered by pride, and bring the best fruits of the virtues from the sympathy with fictitious sorrow. I think that this deep impression was then made in the female bosom, and that it was no delusion which led me to notice in the loveliest faces in the world a strongly marked sensibility, derived from the enjoyment of this fascinating actress. What our great observer had noticed in the case of Percy was now repeated. Mrs. Siddons became the glass 'in which our noble youth did dress themselves'; and those who frequented her exhibitions became related to her look, to her deportment and her utterance; the lowest point of imitation, that of the dress, was early, and wisely too, adopted; for it was at all times the praise of Mrs. Siddons to be exquisitely chaste and dignified in her exterior—*simplex munditiis*.[1]

There is often a singular coincidence in the production of excellence. Minds of peculiar power appear in clusters—the eloquence of the State was now as greatly distinguished as that of the stage. At the time that Mrs. Siddons quitted Cheltenham, her summer circuit, to delight the metropolis with her talent, William Pitt quitted the circuit, the law courts, and his chambers in Lincoln's Inn, to become at three and twenty his Majesty's Chancellor of

[1] In a work of fiction, of which the sensibility has never been exceeded, Madame de Stael Holstein, in the person of her heroine, has left her own impressions from a performance of Isabella by Mrs. Siddons. It is every way valuable, but must be read in her own language.

'La noble figure et la profonde sensibilité de l'actrice captivèrent tellement l'attention de Corinne, que pendant les premiers actes ses yeux ne se détournèrent pas du théâtre. La déclamation anglaise est plus propre qu'aucune autre à remuer l'âme, quand un beau talent en fait sentir la force et l'originalité. Il y a moins d'art, moins de convenu qu'en France; l'impression qu'elle produit est plus immédiate; le désespoir veritable s'exprimerait ainsi; et la nature des pièces et le genre de la versification plaçant l'art dramatique à moins de distance de la vie réelle, l'effet qu'il produit est plus déchirant.

'En Angleterre on peut tout risquer, si la nature l'inspire. Ces longs

the Exchequer, and to amaze, by the splendour of his eloquence, a senate already possessing Fox and Burke. The character of his oratory was of a lofty stamp, and he considered the business of the State as an object of the deepest interest, and the situation of the country as calling for the gravest consideration. The nation had long struggled with the mischievous contest in America; and a House of Commons which had pledged itself never to abandon the right of the mother-country to legislate for the colonies had now compelled an unsuccessful Ministry to propose the peace of independence to refractory subjects. On every view such a subject might be supposed to press deeply upon the hearts and heads of all who felt for their country; and something in a well-born mind might suggest a melancholy sympathy with a sovereign who was thus to relinquish no mean ornament of his crown. Mr. Pitt having carried his favourite measure of conciliation, the House had addressed his Majesty upon that part of the royal speech which announced that 'provisional articles of peace with the American colonies were actually agreed upon'; and the report of that address was brought up. It was at such a moment that Mr. Burke exerted all the powers of his wit to turn the speech of the sovereign into ridicule; and, by breathing freely his vein of sarcastic humour, he kept the House long in continued laughter. But, while he accused Lord Shelburne of duplicity and delusion, he affected to give the most liberal assent to the virtue, integrity, and honour of Mr. Pitt. The youthful Minister rose with the feeling

gémissements, qui paraissent ridicules quand on les raconte, font tressaillir quand on les entend. L'actrice la plus noble dans ses manières, Madame Siddons, ne perd rien de sa dignité quand elle se prosterne contre terre. Il n'y a rien qui ne puisse être admirable, quand une émotion intime y entraîne.

* * * * *

'Enfin il arriva ce moment terrible où Isabelle, s'étant échappée des mains des femmes qui veulent l'empêcher de se tuer, rit, en se donnant un coup de poignard, de l'inutilité de leurs efforts. Ce rire du désespoir est l'effet le plus difficile et le plus remarquable que le jeu dramatique puisse produire; il émeut bien plus que les larmes; cette amère ironie du malheur est son expression la plus déchirante. Qu'elle est terrible, la souffrance du cœur, quand elle inspire une si barbare joie, quand elle donne, à l'aspect de son propre sang, le contentement féroce d'un sauvage ennemi qui se serait vengé!'

that became him, and hushed the volatile temper of the House into attention 'still as night,' while he read a lecture of decorum to the veteran orator; and, what Fénélon never imagined, Telemachus was seen reproving the indiscretion of Mentor.

'He said the present was a moment for seriousness and not for mirth. The gay flowers of a brilliant and exuberant fancy were proper for their season—the hours of recreation and conviviality. He should be happy to share in the delights of that fertile imagination which had so long been the wonder and the pleasure of the House; but he could not indulge himself in admiring the beautiful 'motes which people the sunbeam' when his mind was occupied with objects so serious and important as those before the House. It was only in circles of amusement that it became men to give a loose to their imagination, and abstract their minds from all business and reflection. He rose, therefore, to bring back the House to sobriety and seriousness, and to tell them that this was neither a fit time, nor the present a proper subject, for the exhibition of a gaudy fancy or the wanton blandishments of theatrical enchantment; it was their duty to break the magician's wand; to dispel the cloud, beautiful as it was, which had been thrown over their heads; and to consider solemnly and gravely the very perilous situation of the country; and by the force of their united wisdom, abilities, and experience, endeavour to extricate the nation from its difficulties by the restoration of an honourable peace.

'That the honourable gentleman's character of the speech from the throne would be admitted by the House he could not believe; because he could not believe that they would consent to call that speech 'a farrago of hypocrisies and absurdities,' which they had unanimously approved, and for which they had, without a single dissentient voice, agreed to present his Majesty with an address of thanks. That his Majesty's serious admonitions to his Parliament should be branded with such epithets—that his feelings on so affecting a subject as the dismemberment of his empire should be outraged; that his speech, delivered with all the sacredness of royalty, should be charged with mockery, hypocrisy, and even profaneness, were things which he did not expect to

CHAPTER X

BETWEEN the 10th of October and the 30th Mrs. Siddons repeated Isabella eight times, and it became obvious that in gentle domestic woe she had no rival. It was judicious in the management to put her next upon the display of the heroic attributes, which equally distinguished her; and in many respects Euphrasia, in Murphy's *Grecian Daughter*, was worthy of her skill. On the 30th of October, therefore, she assumed the graces of filial piety, and met the full impression which Mrs. Barry had left in a part calculated for her powers, and to which her husband had added the support of an Evander not to be surpassed. But old Mr. Sheridan entertained no doubt as to the result, and Murphy, with all the natural partialities of his country, opened his heart to one capable of extending his fame.

I have not yielded to that ungenerous criticism which, even in its tears, denied the palm of tragedy to Murphy. He is at times inflated and unnatural, as when, at the close of his first act, he makes even Euphrasia utter the rant which follows:—

> 'This arm shall do a deed,
> For Heav'n and earth—for men and gods to wonder at!'

Such a boast was unworthy of Euphrasia's virtue; and the author might have seen that, whatever this deed should be, the gods were little likely to wonder at what, under any system of mythology, they are presumed to inspire.

What would Murphy have thought, when himself acting the part of Jaffier in *Venice Preserved*, if some popular Belvidera had determined to secure a thunder of applause; and instead of allowing him the high appeal set down for

her husband, had exclaimed with all the modesty of Euphrasia :—

> 'Hear this, ye heavens! and wonder how ye made me!'

One great difficulty his fable imposed upon him—preventing, I mean, the kind of sustenance which Euphrasia bore unperceived to her father from becoming ludicrous—it could never have been shown in action—yet it must be known—it must be described, and the language must be so cautious as to throw a transparent veil over what it declares. He prepares the incident even in his first act.

> '*Euph.* Yes, Phocion, go;
> Go with my child, torn from this matron breast—
> This breast that still should yield its nurture to him.'

He has thus, by a happy line, invested her with the unquestioned power to relieve him; that relief is thus exhibited by Philotas :—

> 'On the bare earth
> Evander lies; and as his languid pow'rs
> Imbibe with eager thirst the kind refreshment,
> Euphrasia views him with the tend'rest glance,
> Even as a mother doating on her child.'

Nor is the comment on the deed inferior in delicacy to its description :—

> 'All her laws
> Inverted quite, great Nature triumphs still!'

I shall at least imitate the discretion of the poet, and leave the reader to surmise the terms, which, had they been different, would have ruined the pathos of the scene, and perhaps excited laughter.

Murphy had no great stock of tragic expression, and refused nothing, therefore, that could bestow either grace, or tenderness, or beauty. When Euphrasia talks of her delighted task to tend her father—to smooth the pillow of declining age—watch every look, explore the unutterable wish—the poet but copies the tender duties of Pope from the Prologue to the *Satires*.

> 'Me let the tender office long engage,
> To rock the cradle of reposing age,
> Explore the thought—explain the asking eye.'

He even copies Tate, where Tate has condescended to improve Shakespeare—in *King Lear*, for instance; but the passages shall sleep undisturbed.

As to the charming representative of Euphrasia, some surprise was expressed upon her entrance. She was a perfectly different being from herself in Isabella. The settled sorrow that weighed down the wife, the presumed widow of Biron, had given place to a mental and personal elasticity obviously capable of efforts 'above heroic.' Hope seemed to brighten her crest and duty to nerve her arm. She had parted with her husband and her child upon the sea shore—the filial impulse had been triumphant—in the cause of her aged father she came now to perish or to conquer.

The person of Mrs. Siddons rather courted the regal attire, and her beauty became more vivid from the decorations of her rank. The commanding height and powerful action of her figure, though always feminine, seemed to tower beyond her sex. Till this night we had not heard the full extent, nor much of the quality of her voice. An opportunity occurred, even in the first act, to throw out some of its most striking tones. In a scene of hypocrisy the usurper Dionysius had assured her of Evander's health, and that the evening of his days should pass in tranquillity and honour. The next instant unfolds the real truth to her, that he is perishing for want of sustenance. The audience trembled when, in a voice that never broke nor faltered in its climax, she thus to earth and heaven denounced the tyrant:—

> 'Shall he not tremble when a daughter comes,
> Wild with her griefs, and terrible with wrongs?
> The man of blood shall hear me!—Yes, my voice
> Shall mount aloft upon the whirlwind's wing.'

In the following act a passage occurs still more calculated for effect, which impressed the picture sense of the fancy as if the image described actually stood before you. Euphrasia suspects Evander to have been murdered, and is counselled by Philotas to restrain her frantic grief and retire at that season of repose:—

'*Euph.* And dost thou then, inhuman that thou art,
Advise a wretch like me to know repose?
This is my last abode; these caves, these rocks,
Shall ring for ever with Euphrasia's wrongs;
Here will I dwell, and rave, and shriek, and giving
These scatter'd locks to all the passing winds,
Stand on the cliff in madness and despair!'

The power of the pencil lost this momentary sublimity—Hamilton's Euphrasia is not even Mrs. Siddons at any moment—this was out of his daring, and Lawrence was then in the elements of art, but an admirable scholar.

Much of Euphrasia is, however, but splendid pantomime, and I need not say how finely everything of this kind was done by Mrs. Siddons. But in this character she had an opportunity to throw out that collected and dignified contempt, in the expression of which her mind combined with her features to baffle the most ardent fancy. It is of all our emotions that I think the most suited to her countenance—I should name it as unattainable by any but her own. The passage is in the fourth act, where Dionysius requires her to draw off her husband, Phocion, and his powers, from the siege: to which she replies—

'Think'st thou then
So meanly of my Phocion? Dost thou deem him
Poorly wound up to a mere fit of valour,
To melt away in a weak woman's tear?
Oh, thou dost little know him!'

At the last line there is a triumphant hurry and enjoyment in her scorn, which the audience caught as electrical, and applauded in rapture for at least a minute. I am aware, referring to personal character, how erroneous in many instances the inference would be from the powers of the actress to the actual possession of such qualities in the woman. Her spectators here inferred, at least, that all was not seeming; and that in any signal crisis of her own life she would be found indeed the noble creature she appeared to be upon the stage.

In the progressive business of the play, extremely well planned by Murphy, nothing to the silent observer was more beautiful or interesting than the look of Mrs. Siddons when Philotas enters, who is ordered to bring Evander

before the tyrant—her suspicion of his falsehood brightening up into grateful love, as he invents the tale of his death and the disposal of the body, were among the most intellectual displays of her art. In the important moment when Dionysius, rushing upon her father, is stopped by Euphrasia's dagger—

> 'A daughter's arm, fell monster, strikes the blow!
> Yes, first she strikes—an injured daughter's arm
> Sends thee devoted to the infernal gods!'

compared with any other effort, I can only say that there appeared now more soul in the purpose, more nerve in the blow.

Again, as on a former occasion, I think anybody but the heroine herself should have exclaimed to Phocion :—

> 'Lo! there the wonders of Euphrasia's arm.'

It is too much in the spirit of Virgil's mighty Amazon :—

> 'Advenit qui vestra dies, muliebribus armis,
> Verba redargueret: nomen tamen haud leve patrum
> Manibus hoc referes, telo cecidisse Camillæ.'

> 'Lo! by a woman's arm, this fatal hour
> Thy boast is answered, and thy vaunts no more!
> Go! let thy sire the glorious tidings know;
> Camilla sent thee to the shades below.'
>
> *Pitt. Æn. XI.*, v. 687

Capable under an impulse of despair of striking even a mortal blow, the pious daughter, the tender wife and mother, should recoil from blood; exultation is for tougher natures. Death upon the stage is supported often by our fortunate incredulity—the dagger of the heroine wears no jot of blood—its blade finds another sheath than the breast of the victim. Once only was this necessary etiquette not observed: the weapon did not slip back to its ivory handle, and Mrs. Siddons unconsciously wounded Palmer in Dionysius.

It will be readily imagined that the manager of Covent Garden was desirous to place himself, even as to tragedy itself, in full rivalry with the other house. He now led the way as to the performance of *The Grecian Daughter*, which he revived for the express purpose of exhibiting Mrs. Yates

in a part suited to the Grecian character of her figure and countenance. On the 21st of October she performed Euphrasia for the first time. She was supported strongly by the Evander of Henderson, and the Dionysius of Aickin. It has been observed that the most perfect forms of ancient art have little positive expression in the face; and indeed such a principle accords with the character of statuary, which produces a collective rather than a discriminative effect; is to be felt as a whole rather than by any single part; and which, by the forcible expression of any one passion, would tire upon the eye, which can long rest only upon perfect symmetry and grace.

Mrs. Yates had but little expression to animate a form and countenance almost as perfect as the model which she perpetually brought to mind; her voice, too, had a monotony in perfect consent with her person; as the latter was eminently grand and beautiful, so the former was exquisitely harmonious. But passion was now the great desideratum, and of this soul of tragedy she had infinitely less than Miss Younge, then acting with her at the same theatre. She repeated *The Grecian Daughter* on the 28th, as a sort of anticipation of the character then to be immediately acted by Mrs. Siddons, that performance having decidedly appropriated the play to Drury Lane, Miss Younge and she acted, on the 31st, Hermione and Andromache in *The Distressed Mother*, and all their tragedy became strictly confined in the Castle of Andalusia for some time. Mrs. Yates next acted Lady Macbeth to the Macbeth of Henderson, and at that time passed for the greatest that had been seen since Mrs. Pritchard; in the sleeping scene, however, I am satisfied that Miss Younge had more speaking terrors, and in all but the commanding action with the daggers had more nature and more effect than her beautiful rival. The only perfect wife of Glamis was at this time, as the 'new star,' unwisely slighted by them both, as Garrick had been mistaken by Quin. When people in their anger, their impatience, or their spleen, availed themselves of a figure of speech of so marked a kind, it is somewhat singular that they never remembered, or never inferred, the great result of such an appearance.

It was unquestionably good management not to wear down the effect of *Isabella*; and, as an interchange, *The Grecian Daughter* touched some of the best feelings of our nature; but the other characters are feeble copies, and the dialogue has always been heard before; it is an affair of contrivance and memory, and though creditable to industry and taste, displays little genius, and no originality.

The next choice was happier, the *Jane Shore* of Rowe. This pleasing poet and excellent man was one of the honours of Westminster School, of which he was a king's scholar. His philosophy, like his poetry, was systematic, and he deduced all the virtues from a simple stock. 'The foundation,' says Rowe, 'of all the other virtues is good-nature; good-nature, which is friendship between man and man, good breeding in courts, charity in religion, and the true spring of all beneficence in general.' He is said to have possessed his favourite quality in a high degree, and, as a moral teacher, to give his experience along with his precept. He had been engaged in public business, and was acquainted with courts; he had written plays, and was acquainted intimately with poets; but his temper seems to have carried him through these ordeals of fire and water without injury; as he never knew want, he put friendship to no severe trial; as he was constantly attended by success, it would have been difficult for him to avoid either benevolence or politeness. He could have no concern as to religious dogmas, and he had only to evince by his charity to others that he was grateful to that Providence which had so distinguished him among men, whom nature or circumstance constitutes the martyrs of spleen, or disappointment, or disease.

When *Shore* was first produced, the cast was such as cannot be paralleled in modern times. The charming Mrs. Oldfield was the Shore, and Mrs. Porter, whom the storm of passion always lifted from a musical monotony which characterised her, acted the furious Alicia. Booth was Hastings, Wilks, Shore, and Cibber the Gloster, a part which the great Richard III. of the stage did not disdain.

When Mrs. Siddons acted Shore, the Alicia was a Mrs.

Ward, allied by name only to the family of Kemble; and she was in full contrast indeed to Mrs. Siddons. Smith in Hastings was like Smith in everything else. He wore his sword-knot for a difference; but the same healthy hunter's countenance glowed over the shoulders of all his heroes, and one drowsy, measured, level tone conveyed alike declamation or passion, pressed heavily upon the ear, and left the hearer's breast equally unmoved with his own. Dumont (Shore), whose forgiving, gentle humanity might have been even graced by the silver tones and soft manners of James Aickin, was consigned to Bensley, whose very voice rendered all deception upon Shore impossible. He acted, as he always did, with terrible energy; and what was thus cast away upon Shore might have bestowed upon Gloster some of those fierce features which Aickin never could assume for a moment. In short, the utter insipidity of that actor in the Protector, I believe, contributed to the very general impression that he had no resemblance whatever to the crook-backed tyrant of Shakespeare; a point which on the stage was first decided by the powerful effort of Kemble; and proved, as to composition, by myself, from a careful comparison of passages in the two plays, and an exhibition of even abundance of Shakespearean phraseology.

The dignified expression of Mrs. Siddons presented what never could have been the physiognomy of Shore. The wife of that worthy citizen had melted before the ardour of a royal suitor, and she preserved the affections of Edward by unbounded good temper and playful hilarity. Mrs. Siddons presented a being of a lofty mind which could have been depraved only by itself—ambition or vanity alone could become her ruin. The first look of her, therefore, threw a doubt upon her situation and its sorrows.

It is a curious problem in morals, whence has arisen the almost affectionate regard paid even by the gravity of history to the mistresses of kings? Misfortune has, we know, a sanctifying power, but the distinctions between virtue and vice ought never to be forgotten. We have our own Rosamonds and Shores, and the French have their Gabrielles and their La Vallières. It never occurs to us to examine the state or commiserate the feelings of those whose rights

are invaded by these amiable wantons; and Lord Orford has not been ashamed to prefer the reign of the witty, the voluptuous, the shameless adulteress, Montespan, to that of the chaste, the charitable, and the pious Maintenon.

As an outside resemblance of Shore, I think Mrs. Hartley offered the most appropriate form and features. I shall never lose the impression of her golden beauty, and question whether anything human ever exceeded it. But the dramatic effect of Shore is purely mental, and much of the character could be adequately performed only by Mrs. Siddons.

There is but little in the first act by which any enviable distinction can be gained, till we arrive at the melancholy wisdom of its close. The tender flattery of Alicia, that mankind, however ungenerous to the sex at large, would have no language for Shore but that of praise, and throw a veil of kind oblivion over her errors, is answered in a tone which Mrs. Siddons made an impressive warning—

> 'Why should I think that man will do for me,
> What yet he never did for wretches like me?'

The hopeless sweetness that lingered on to the conclusive rhymes still comes occasionally upon my ear, and I think, if the sub-divisions of our musical scale were more numerous, that I could note down its tune: even that would be something in these discordant days.

> 'Ruin ensues, reproach and endless shame,
> And one false step entirely damns her fame:
> In vain with tears the loss she may deplore,
> In vain look back on what she was before;
> She sets, like stars that fall, to rise no more.'

The fourth act, however, exhibits the mind of Shore in all its redeeming value. The Protector had told her that the State had determined to set aside the unavailing infancy of Edward's children, and vest the sovereign rule in abler hands: by the contemptuous expressions which he uses in stating the opposition of Hastings, he clearly indicates to her his own opinions—

> 'This, though of great importance to the public,
> Hastings, for very peevishness and spleen,
> Does stubbornly oppose.'

Here our original thinker, without wasting a thought or a look upon Gloster, burst out into a blaze of engrossing exultation.

> '*J. Sh.* Does he—does Hastings?
> Reward him for the noble deed, just Heavens:
> For this one action guard him and distinguish him
> With signal mercies, and with great deliverance!'

It should be remembered that this nobleman had just insulted her misery and endeavoured to violate her person; that the friendly hand which then protected her had been fettered by his power; yet this master-key once struck, all her own injuries are dumb before the interests of her master's offspring, and she would consecrate to the end of time the generosity that had espoused their cause. Shore, therefore, never stops an instant to consider the prudent or the palatable, neither does she enter into a contest with Gloster, or for the moment 'set her life at a pin's fee.' It was well observed, when she first appeared, by an anonymous critic, that 'all other sensations were so totally absorbed, and these she poured forth in such a rapture of dignified enthusiasm, that the spectator forgot, while she was speaking, the danger she incurred.'

What Gloster could appear otherwise than insignificant by the side of Mrs. Siddons, when, in defiance of his frown, she pursued the triumph of virtue in verse numerous and beautiful and subduing like the following?—

> 'Oh! that my tongue had every grace of speech
> Great and commanding as the breath of kings;
> Sweet as the poet's numbers, and prevailing
> As soft persuasion to a love-sick maid;
> That I had art and eloquence divine,
> To pay my duty to my master's ashes,
> And plead till death the cause of injur'd innocence!'

I see the hope, perhaps the exultation, of the poet in the eloquent wish of the heroine. In this passage, and another in the present scene, Rowe is inferior to no poet that ever existed. So highly, indeed, had the author and his great actress worked upon the hearer's imagination, that when tyranny denounced its vengeance, and its ministers were commanded to see her perish for want an involuntary

scepticism came over the mind that the fate was impossible, and that the very stones would become bread rather than a hair of that beauteous head should perish.

But the fifth act of this play exhibits that dreadful certainty in the great drama of life, that, for purposes which must not be questioned, the repentant and even the innocent are subjected occasionally to the persecution of the bad. The menaces of Gloster have taken effect—her guard has been long vigilant, and the unhappy frail one is perishing of hunger. She watches an opportunity, and at length arrives unnoticed at the door of Alicia, whom she had entrusted with the remains of her former affluence.

The appearance of Mrs. Siddons at this moment excited pity, but not disgust; there was no squalor, which may be called the silent cant of misery; her frame seemed enfeebled, and her features sharp and prominent; her eye, ever obedient to her will, had parted with its brilliancy, and every sense seemed to be summed up in caution, when it stole a glance around to make sure that the appeal to her charity would not injure that dear friend from whom she expected to receive it. I always viewed this dumb language of her action in breathless agitation.

There is a beauty in the courteous but unsuitable epithet with which she addresses the servant who opens the door at her knocking:—

> 'Is your lady,
> My gentle friend, at home?'

She is repelled with rudeness; the man has had his orders, and is even brutal.

There was, in my early days, such a permanent property as a stage-door in our theatres, and the proscenium beyond it; so that when Shore was pushed from the door, she was turned round and staggered till supported by the firm projection behind her. Here was a terrific picture full in the eye of the pit, and this most picturesque of women knew the amazing value of it. The entrance of Alicia, raving mad, or only sensible enough for outrage, put an end to all rational feeling, and is a severe infliction upon the character of Shore. It now, however, draws to its close, and some amends are made by the interview with her

husband. The touches of true pathos here abound, and are wound up by the most affecting line that expiring frailty ever breathed into the ear of an injured being—

'Forgive me! but forgive me.'

I well remember (how is it possible I should ever forget?) the sobs, the shrieks, among the tenderer part of her audiences; or those tears, which manhood at first struggled to suppress, but at length grew proud of indulging. We then, indeed, knew all the luxury of grief; but the nerves of many a gentle being gave way before the intensity of such appeals, and fainting fits long and frequently alarmed the decorum of the house, filled almost to suffocation.

We hear much of the moral effect of the stage, and from our youth onward we all repeat, after Aristotle, the important truth, that the mind is purified by terror and pity. But I have never met with any very clear demonstration of the process; and, for the most part, the stage is imagined to improve us by its doctrine alone; and folly has often boasted its effects of this nature, in opposition to a school of which the doctrine is always pure, and the sanction unquestionable. But the whole mystery is in the emotions it raises in us, and the kindred emotions which the wonderful principle of association is sure to awaken. And as when the benevolent emotions are excited, the heart swells and the hand is liberal; so such moments evince the effect of the lesson in a prompt forgiveness of offence, in a ready charity, and an extension even of the common kindness which we show to our relatives or our servants. We owe it to the bounty of Providence that we sympathise only with actions that promote the happiness of the species; whatever is prejudicial excites our contempt or abhorrence in proportion to its power.

When the effect of any extraordinary courage is upon us, beside the admiration (a natural tribute which we pay to the hero) a separate feeling is raised, which, for a time, strengthens our own nerve, and induces us to believe that we ourselves could thus also act or suffer. It is the same with the softer virtues; while the emotions which they excite in us are fresh, before either a selfish prudence or

the hurry of life abate their keenness; at a tale of wretchedness our bounty and our tears flow copiously together, and we are improved by the sympathetic emotions of virtue. At such a moment we give to a particular case even a false measure of relief, and must become cool before we can perceive it.

'So I gave him (says Sterne) no matter what—I am ashamed to say how much, now—and was ashamed to think how little, then.'—*Sentimental Journey.*

That what is so delightful may not be transient, our frequent indulgence must beget a habit, and the habit itself not merely extends but augments our virtue, as the limbs acquire strength by use. 'Thus,' says a profound philosopher, 'proper means being at hand to raise this sympathetic emotion, its frequent reiteration may, in a good measure, supply the want of a more complete exercise. By proper discipline, therefore, every person may acquire a settled habit of virtue: intercourse with men of worth, histories of generous and disinterested actions, and frequent meditation upon them keep the sympathetic emotion in constant exercise, which by degrees introduceth a habit, and confirms the authority of virtue. With respect to education, in particular, what a spacious and commodious avenue to the heart of a young person is here opened!'

Now the drama shows all that is here suggested, in the verisimilitude of action, with every artifice of choice and preparation and contrast, in all the refinements of language and all the harmonies of verse. While the stage, too, possesses such an artist as Mrs. Siddons, every grace of form and gesture, all the eloquence of the eye, and magic of the tongue, conspire to fascinate and control the breast; and thus the sympathetic emotion frequently and at pleasure excited, we are moulded in our minds to virtue, and our hearts really purified by terror and by pity.

To return to the regular business of the theatre.

At this distance of time the policy of management seems to be somewhat strange, and its prudence questionable. A great genius had started before the public, and displayed a power of attraction, I had almost said commensurate with its value. Mrs. Siddons had acted three characters only of

that copious list which the talents of our poets had given as a possession to the stage for ever ; there could, therefore, exist no necessity for employing her upon new and doubtful materials. Yet at this time was a piece put into rehearsal, not even avowed by its author, meanly written, and in prose, and a heroine of the name of Louisa Montague assigned to the care of the great actress.

It seems to spring from the circulating library, and might allowably occupy the tearful half of a modern comedy. A Mr. Montague formerly addressed a very haughty lady whose name is Henrietta ; she repulses him with scorn and marries a Lord Sidney, I presume for his title, obtaining a settlement of her fortune upon herself. Her nature and her independence lead her to treat the noble Lord with uncommon insolence, and she displays in the union all the captious tyranny of a spoiled wanton.

Mr. Montague has prudently united himself to Louisa Somerville—they attain the highest happiness in mutual love, and a son, the pledge and representative of their virtues. A fiendlike propensity induces Lady Sidney to endeavour to disturb this felicity, and try to awaken the affection which she had formerly inspired. She follows Montague to a masquerade, and even on her knees implores an interview, which he is weak enough to consent to, on the following morning. The whole day, however, is lingered out in their explanation, and he is seen quitting the house by a friend of Lord Sidney's. A duel follows, which sends poor Montague home mortally wounded. With his last breath he implores the forgiveness of his wife, who, under the shock, expires at the feet of the unhappy man, bequeathing her little orphan to the care of her brother.

Meanly conceived, meanly written in prose, as I have said, and little bearable in the acting but Mrs. Siddons herself, it was violently opposed on the first night, quietly received on the second, and on the third, with about fifty pounds in the house, the author, his benefit, and his play sunk into oblivion, to the relief of the actress and the town. It was ascribed, however, to the pen of the friend of Shenstone, and personal acquaintance might have to

answer for its intrusion. The treasury having, however, so decidedly seconded the critics, the doom was never afterwards reversed.

It will occur to the reader as remarkable that the fable of the above piece, changing the cast, was by an enemy, more than five and twenty years after, made the ground of an attack upon the fame and fortune of Mrs. Siddons.

But from the attempt in tragedy of the veteran actor Hull, she turned herself to the British Racine, and animated his *Fair Penitent* with a spirit all her own. It is probable that Mrs. Siddons actually needed little preparation in any leading character of the drama. She had no doubt long settled all the points, the landmarks of her progress; however, a fortnight was well occupied in getting up the play, and on the 29th of November her Calista was added to the attractions of the stage.

If a hearer or reader of Lothario's description of his triumph turn his thoughts to the appearance of Calista, it will be difficult for him to imagine the remaining importance that can surround her person. Mountains of infamy will seem to crush her before every eye, and he will wonder how the haughtiest soul, if it can even disregard the victim of its crimes, can bear its own recollections or the broad glare of day. Calista seems always to be superior alike to vengeance or to pity. She has dignity even in her weakness, and feels reproof as an insult to her pride, when it can be none to her virtue. To Altamont she is ungenerous as well as false; all his splendid virtues, his unbounded love, are thrown from her estimate of him, and he is an object of her hatred because she neither can nor wishes to return his affection. When alarmed by a hint of her infamy, she would pierce him through the sides of her monitor. Whoever dare to tax her with guilt is an officious parasite who is supposed to flatter merely the prejudice of her husband, that husband whose very life depends upon her regard for him. All this is in the very finest observance of nature; our passions always colour either persons or events against the strongest evidence; and under the dominion of vehement passion we can be made to see only what we wish to be true.

The second act is opened by Calista and her maid Lucilla. The look, the step of the great actress announced the whole character upon her entrance. The counsel of her attendant is to turn from the deceiver and allow of the efforts of her husband to render her happy; the rebuke is even indignant, 'Away! I think not of him.' The sullen picture of a solitude created by her fancy was amazingly delivered by Mrs. Siddons; but Rowe has wrought it up with fearful magnificence of language:—

> 'No sound to break the silence, but a brook
> That bubbling winds among the weeds: no mark
> Of any human shape that had been there,
> Unless a skeleton of some poor wretch,
> Who had, long since, like me, by love undone,
> Sought that sad place out, to despair and die in.'

Calista has learned the usual cant of the guilty; she would hide her from 'the malice of a base world,' and even from shame, but that it must accompany her flight. Nothing could exceed the agony with which Mrs. Siddons ejaculated—

> 'To be a tale for fools! scorn'd by the women,
> And pity'd by the men! O, insupportable!'

Upon the entrance of Altamont she recovers her self-possession, and it is impossible to describe the apathy beyond all hope of change with which she considered her wedding-day.

The scene with Horatio had some powerful touches; though, for the greater part, he has the mastery in the altercation, the almost frantic assumption of her privilege struck like a thunderbolt.

> 'Dishonour blast thee, base, unmanner'd slave,
> That dar'st forget my birth, and sacred sex,
> And shock me with the rude, unhallow'd sound!'

The snatching and tearing the letter, and the contemptuous rebuke of the monitor whom she had foiled, and left without the evidence that could alone justify his conduct, were astonishingly perfect.

The fourth act is opened by a tearful but ineffectual interview between Calista and Lothario. Altamont enters, and from her own lips overhears a confession of his wrongs.

The duel follows, and leisurely enough, in the presence of Calista; she hears the triumph of her lover boasted by him in his last moments, does not faint, thinks not of summoning aid, and never tries to force herself between their weapons. In reading the play I feel this to be one of the most awkward situations in which an actress can possibly be placed. I have seen this great genius many times in the character—never then noticed any deficiency, and cannot imagine, while I am writing, how she was employed during the time.

On the entrance of Sciolto, from a host of beauties, must be snatched the two lines—

> 'Is it the voice of thunder, or my father?'

and

> ''Tis for my ruin that the tempest rises.'

The Fair Penitent is a play of anticipations: the guilt of the heroine is established in the first act, and by the comic expedient of dropping a letter; the profligate is killed in the fourth; and the fifth is furnished by the undertaker, the body lying in state with its usual accompaniments of escutcheons and skulls and bones, with the accomplice as chief mourner, to survey his fate and meditate her own.

The moral beauties, however, shoot with great lustre through the pompous horror, and the pantomimic display of the scene is rendered accessory to much powerful impression:—

> 'What charnel has been rifled for these bones?
> Fie! this is pageantry. They look uncouthly;
> But what of that, if he or she that own'd 'em,
> Safe from disquiet sit, and smile to see
> The farce their miserable relics play?
>
> * * * * *
>
> But here's a sight is terrible indeed!
> Is this that haughty, gallant, gay Lothario?
> That dear perfidious—ah! how pale he looks!'

The author of the *Night Thoughts* owned here the tragic sublimity of Rowe, and his Zanga is but the echo of Calista:—

> '*Zanga.* Is this Alonzo? Where 's his haughty mien?
> Is that the hand which smote me? Heav'ns, how pale!'

Mr. Cumberland in some remarks upon this play, comparing it with *The Fatal Dowry*, has censured what he calls the pagan principle of avoiding guilty shame by suicide. The high fantastic principle of honour belongs, however, to chivalrous Christianity rather than to Pagan antiquity. Was this expiation of disgrace ever objected to Corneille—is it not the soul of the immortal *Cid*? Nay, much later, did not Mr. Burke exult in the supposition that Antoinette would relieve herself from the infamy of perishing by a vulgar hand? He thus alludes to the sharp antidote to disgrace: 'That in the last extremity she will save herself from the last disgrace, and that if she must fall she will fall by no ignoble hand.'

But the critic's desire to lower the fame of Rowe makes him stoop even to the petty verbal cavil which follows. Rowe had talked of that spirit that dwelt in Latian breasts, when 'Rome was mistress of the world.' 'To what,' says he, 'does that piece of information tend, that Rome was mistress of the world?' To what! why to the inference that the period of public and private honour was the same—that her empire was the result of her virtues.

The last act is protracted by several ingenious expedients—the father, whose firm nerve has supplied his daughter with the means of expiating her guilt, hurries, however, from the sight of the sacrifice. He is summoned to an encounter of the Lothario faction, in the mode of the Capulets and Montagues, and perishes, like Mercutio, in this private feud. The intelligence of his fate hurries on the hitherto lingering dagger.

'*Cal.* And dost thou bear me yet, thou patient earth.'

The clouds of error dispel over dying eyes; and the heroine, comforted by paternal forgiveness, and sensible to the reproaching goodness of her husband, leaves him a legacy of beginning affection, and admires something more than his virtues:—

'Now, 'tis too late,
And yet my eyes take pleasure to behold thee;
Thou art their last dear object.'

As to the general manners by which Mrs. Siddons

discriminated Calista, they seem to be 'a haughty affectation of being above control, which a deviation from virtue ever produces in a great but proud woman; the conscience is stilled by an assumption of superiority—she does not deny the rule, but conceives herself an allowed exception. For the most part her Calista walked with some precipitation; her gestures were more frequent and violent; her eyes restless and suspicious—she was more vehement and loud—pride and shame were struggling for superiority—guilt and indignation alike contributed to contract her brow—the most speaking terrors preceded and announced the blow of death. Calista was hitherto the noblest effort of her powers, and the sound critic might anticipate in this impersonation of *The Fair Penitent* the more concentrated energies of Lady Macbeth.

While our great actress was thus, with rapid step, seizing all the honours of tragedy, it must not be supposed that no effort was made to sustain the fame of one of her rivals. An anonymous critic, who might probably be the husband of Mrs. Yates, was 'better employed' than seeing Mrs. Siddons in Calista, by making 'a "willing part" of the audience at Covent Garden. It would have been disreputable to the town not to have "vindicated their taste" by being present at such acting as Mrs. Yates's Almeria.'

Now, here are two genteel insinuations: first, that the spectators of Mrs. Siddons go unwillingly to her performances; and, second, that the tasteless only can admire them. But something was to be said to palliate the want in Mrs. Yates of that vivid and various expression which distinguished her rival; and Dickey here excelled his usual skill:—'If,' says he, 'her countenance is not over-changing, it suits the unchanging sorrows of Almeria.' He thought it necessary to assign a reason why the very clothes she wore did not contribute to her fame. 'From the nature and circumstances of Almeria, Mrs. Yates had no opportunity of showing her accomplished taste in dress.'

The reader will not, I trust, suppose me insensible to the powers of Mrs. Yates, though I reprehend the baseness of thus combating her rival. So deeply, indeed, am I impressed with the majestic grandeur of her person, and the

musical enchantment of her declamation, that, in this imperial tragedy of Congreve's, I cordially agree with our critic, that her fourth act, and her last scene, with Dr. Johnson's favourite series of lines in the second act, were all of them in the 'highest style of sublime tragedy.'

At the time when I am recording the contests of a former period, we are exempted from similar effects, not by the prevalence of softer manners, but by the absence of anything approaching to greatness.

It is a mere grammatical remark, but it may be worth noticing, that Rowe in this play has deformed his lines with those barbarous contractions sha'not and wo'not, for shall and will not; where the prosody is injured by the elision, and the speaker would be stronger by being allowed the full words. I fear the practice was fashionable in his time, but demands no continuance in ours. Had I been Mr. Kemble, I would never have reprinted in Lothario—

'This wo'not brook delay.'

Can't and won't are colloquial monosyllables in present use, but when we give the two syllables we articulate both the words.

The unprecedented attraction of Mrs. Siddons had been met on the part of the proprietors of Drury Lane Theatre with suitable liberality. Her engagement as to weekly salary was upon an annual rise from £10. I mention this to reconcile the minds of some artistes of the present day to the acceptance of those enormous sums, by the profligacy of managers, forced upon their modesty; which must, by a law in nature, be upon a par with their genius.

The good fortune of our great actress was seconded by her prudence; she launched into no unnecessary expense, to be herself anywhere implied sufficient consequence. She had genteel lodgings in the Strand; was at the theatre in a few minutes; and full of the best inspiration, a mother's feeling for her family, she prepared herself for a life of such exertion as even mocks the toil of mere manual art. But although, as to weekly payment, the managers had not, it may be thought, done too much themselves, they put it in the power of the public to supply any deficiency by allowing

her two benefit nights, and relinquishing the nightly charge, perhaps about £90. Mr. Harris at this time stood, I believe, under an expense at the other house of £150. The fashionable world never distinguished itself with more credit than in the patronage of this charming woman. Her door saw more carriages daily before it than any other private residence in town—it became a passion to admire her, and an honour to be of her acquaintance. We now begin to see dress company in the upper circles, and the demand for boxes was so great at her benefit that the proprietors gave her the use of their own six on that occasion, which she felt to be a seasonable and profitable compliment. The play selected was Otway's *Venice Preserved*, which, as far as pathos is concerned, may be placed in the first rank, if not in the very first place, of English tragedies. In Belvidera Mrs. Siddons had to contend with the fame, or the remembrance, of all the great actresses of the stage, from famous Madame Barry, as she was called, the heroine of the poet and of Betterton, to the perhaps nearly equal Mrs. Barry, the wife of the accomplished rival of Garrick. Of all our poets Otway seems to have had the tenderest soul; and he appears to stand as the proud interpreter of the loveliest relation between the sexes. With an imagination capable of the most exquisite refinements of passion, he possessed a diction alone fitted to reveal them. He had the 'thoughts that breathe'—he had 'the words that burn.'

There is frequently much of personal history in dramatic composition—the author speaks in the character. A few letters exist, signed by Otway, which show him to have entertained a most ardent love for seven years, and to have felt all the agonies of that passion. His language to the lady, Mrs. Barry, his heroine, sometimes reminds one of his Jaffier. 'I have consulted, too, my very self, and find how careless Nature was in framing me; seasoned me hastily with all the most violent inclinations and desires, but omitted the ornaments that should make those qualities become me. I have consulted, too, my lot of fortune, and find how foolishly I wish possession of what is so precious all the world's too cheap for it.'

The reader of Otway will instantly refer to the melancholy apostrophe—

> 'Tell me why, good Heav'n,
> Thou mad'st me what I am, with all the spirit,
> Aspiring thoughts, and elegant desires
> That fill the happiest man!' etc.

He flowed so easily into verse, that he seems unable to keep out of it in his prose. When he writes his gratitude to the Duchess of Portsmouth, in the dedication to the present play, he has these passages printed in prose:—

> 'Your Grace, next Heav'n, deserves it amply from me;
> That gave me life, but on a hard condition;
> Your noble pity and compassion found me
> Where I was far cast backward from my blessing—
> Down in the rear of fortune; call'd me up,
> Plac'd me in the shine, and I have felt its comfort.'

There can be no doubt that *Venice Preserved* must have been greatly productive to its author. Davies, in consent with the common notion of his poverty, says that Jacob Tonson gave £15 for the copyright; but this is written without reflection. The play was printed first in 1682, for Hindmarsh, the original purchaser; in 1704 it appears printed for Ben Tooke, and, I suppose, was by him assigned over to the great patron Jacob, who purchased the right that he might collect the works into volumes, which he did in 1728.

CHAPTER XI

THE performance of Belvidera is now to be gone through with the same degree of attention paid to other characters; and, though only beauties of great prominence can be recorded, where all was beautiful, yet, however imperfect the transcript, it will afford some guide to future artists in selecting the luminous points of their own composition. Nor need they apprehend any servility, as the result of such attention to the merits of others. Many points of impression are inherent in the character—the action is regulated by the act—it must always be done in one way; others admit of almost infinite variety, and in the performer exhibit the extent of his studies in human nature. I have heard of an actor who would not allow his son to attend the performances of my friend Kemble lest his own manner should not be original. Such a rule would have kept Southerne from the page of Shakespeare—the author of *Paradise Lost* from the perusal of the *Iliad*. Every individual's power is or may be an aggregate of many forces reconciled to his own. I see in the actor alluded to what he might have learned; first, to 'use all gently,' and give consequence to moderation; neither to bellow nor to strut, for the first is not eloquent, and the second is not dignified; to avoid all violent extremes, piano succeeding forte, and to keep himself upon his centre, and to move from it. The greatest difficulty in the actor's art is to take his station upon the stage and remain on it, in full possession of himself and indifferent as to his change of place.

When Mrs. Siddons announced her intention as to *Venice Preserved*, the great point was to find a Jaffier. Smith had none of the softer parts of conversation about him. His

Jaffier would at least have sounded like Pierre. The recollection of the wonders in the rivalry between Garrick and Barry would be injurious here; and the mechanism of the character, however well studied, would do nothing without that show of passion, in the want of which Jaffier conspires against a higher sovereignty than that of Venice.

Mr. Brereton, however, felt himself inspired to make the attempt, and, to the surprise of all, acquitted himself in the most masterly manner. From about the level of such parts as Lewson, he sprung into the crown and hearted seat of love, and played in the wonderful fourth act fully up to the demand of such a Belvidera. He was like a thing inspired, and the source of his inspiration was the lovely being with whom he was to act. He might properly exclaim with Leontes before Hermione—

'There is an air comes from her.'

There was no Venetian costume affected, for in modern times it is not worth the inquiry for stage purposes how the different parts of Europe dressed. Jaffier wore a grave but elegant suit, agreeing with his recent circumstances. Pierre, as a soldier, a full suit of scarlet and gold. I think Mr. Kemble once told me that the Venetian soldiers wore white; some slight indication of which peeped up in the white hat and feather of our older Pierres, for which Davies confesses himself unable to assign any reason. Bensley in that character was fully up to the mark, and had just left his friend, after appointing a midnight meeting for the purposes of precious mischief, when the heroine enters on her fond husband's ejaculating, 'Belvidera! poor Belvidera.'

He whom the world has injured is tempted to think that the ties of even kindred and connection are but loosely bound about him, and he fancies a change possible in all. The notion was dissipated to air by the glowing exultation with which Mrs. Siddons threw herself into the embrace of Jaffier:—

'Does this appear like change, or love decaying,
When thus I throw myself into thy bosom,
With all the resolution of strong truth?
I joy more in thee
Than did thy mother, when she hugg'd thee first,
And bless'd the gods for all her travail past.'

The reverse feeling in Jaffier now carries his mind up to sublimity of expression—sublimity which does not exaggerate its object. I give the passage here as the eternal eulogy of the sex:—

> 'O woman, lovely woman! nature made thee
> To temper man; we had been brutes without you:
> Angels are painted fair, to look like you.
> There 's in you all that we believe of heaven,
> Amazing brightness, purity, and truth,
> Eternal joy and everlasting love.'

Upon his picturing the miseries of want, with the images of which his fancy was teeming, nothing ever exceeded the fine burst of passion from Belvidera—

> 'O, I will love thee, even in madness love thee!'

and the act closed with all the natural anticipations of the still greater effects that were to follow.

There is something singularly irregular in the scenery of this play. Upon the breaking up of Jaffier's domestic establishment, he lodges Belvidera, as he tells Pierre, privately for a day or two, till he sees further what fortune will do for him. We next learn that a council 's held, hard by, for the destruction of the empire, and that Jaffier is to be led to the place. We find it not badly chosen; it is the house of the Greek courtesan, Aquilina. But our surprise is extreme to see the private lodging of Belvidera under the same roof. Yet this is actually the case, though our audiences never suspect a syllable of the matter; for when Jaffier has been led to this dark divan, he finds himself unexpectedly at home; he calls rather loudly for Belvidera; awakens her from her repose; she enters the den of the conspirators, and strives to carry off her husband to his rest; but is given to the ruffians as a hostage, till we learn that old Renault has led her back to her apartment.

The modern alteration of this play omits the description of Belvidera's broken slumbers and expecting arms, and the audience imagine that Jaffier has brought her with him, and left her without, till the moment when it became necessary to produce her as his surety. If this was the design, more should have been omitted, particularly—

> 'Who calls so loud at this late peaceful hour?'

The reader anxious for purity will consider that the house may really not be Aquilina's; but that it is one of those immense palaces of Italy, in which persons reside totally apart; where there is room enough for treason to conspire, and profligacy to intrigue, and lonely want to retire, in forgotten apartments, out of the view and suspicion of each other.

For Belvidera, however, this introduction to the conspirators is one of the most enchanting scenes which fancy ever created out of passion and circumstance. Mrs. Siddons bestowed her utmost attention upon it: the almost shriek of the exclamation thrilled every nerve—

'Part! must we part?'

As she is rising from her knees, the conspirators, by their organ Renault, having conjured her to do so—

'Rise, Madam, and command among your servants'—

the alarmed yet searching survey which she took of them was one of those expressions in which the actress writes with characters of fire: you felt that there was a language more eloquent than speech, and saw beauty and intelligence interpret the very silence of the poet.

The agony of astonishment in which she listens to Jaffier's bequest of her, with the accompanying dagger—the sob of melting reproach upon the words—

'O, thou unkind one!'

and the insupportable pathos with which she uttered—

'Don't, pry'thee don't, in poverty forsake me!'

prepared the house for the repetition of the word 'Jaffier!' as she is borne off; and left an interval for the recovery of a great portion of her hearers from a sympathy too intense to be longer endured. The recollections of such power

'Pursue and overtake the wings of time;
And bring about again the hours, the days,
The years that made me happy.'

When thus inspired by Otway, Mrs. Siddons was the true Pythian priestess, and delivered the oracles of Apollo. If the reader suspect me of enthusiasm, I proudly plead

guilty to the charge: the usual feelings of our nature were sufficient for her conquest over the audience; but enthusiasm only can attempt to describe the means or the effects.

In the third act every sensible Belvidera must regret that the stage curtailments do not allow her to give the following fine portrait of a tender and elegant mind engaged in a hellish project:—

> '*Belv.* Why dwells that busy cloud upon thy face?
> Why am I made a stranger?—why that sigh,
> And I not know the cause? Why, when the world
> Is wrapt in rest, why chooses then my love
> To wander up and down in horrid darkness?—
> Why starts he now, and looks as if he wish'd
> His fate were finished?—Tell me, ease my fears:
> Lest when we next time meet, I want the power
> To search into the sickness of thy mind,
> But talk as wildly then as thou look'st now.'

The charm of this lovely inquiry is its strict Nature; it grows alone out of the relations of the two beings: here is no figurative gloomy pomp; the poet and his art are concealed; Belvidera expostulates with her Jaffier.

However, the pruning knife has not cut away all the shoots from this tree of poetry, although the branches here and there look disunited, from a want of those lighter hangings that fill up the great mass so beautifully in the genuine work.

In the very fine reference to Portia, nothing could exceed the swell of soul, but the retort to Jaffier's question of reproach—

> 'No:
> For Brutus trusted her.'

The noble effusion of filial piety was rendered amazingly—

> 'Murder my father!'

and all the witchery of woman dwelt in the question *ad hominem*—

> 'And can'st thou shed the blood that gave me being?'

The 'Remember twelve!' at parting, I find had always been as a great sea-mark to the spectators of this admirable scene. The difficulty is to preserve it from even the

slightest sensual effect, parting from the lips of beauty so striking: the querulous melancholy of tone, partaking of doubt, though still hoping the best, kept it divinely pure in the present instance; and reiterated applause attested the discernment, as well as feeling, of this politest of audiences.

The fourth act shows the struggles of a false point of honour against humanity and love. The argument, however, is closed by the triumphant woman, and the safety of all she loves seems to be within her grasp. The conspiracy is betrayed—the accomplices disdain the stipulated mercy, and Jaffier is conscious of being himself the ruin of the man whom he best loved. It is impossible to find, I think, a scene of equal variety and emotion. The way that Belvidera herself provokes the sacrifice, by reminding him of the approaching death of his friends and the falsehood of the senate, altogether constitutes a restless agony, which is relieved by the sudden spring of Belvidera into the arms of Jaffier, where her

'Now then, kill me!'

renders such an action impossible to anything human.

I have said that the acting of Brereton in this scene was fully up to the demand of the finest actress I have ever known. Kemble had more art, but his sorrow was not so manly—he was infinitely more picturesque, but I question whether he touched the heart beyond Brereton, in this his moment of inspiration.

The way in which this play was originally printed has left one speech in this, its capital scene, imperfect; a line is lost, as a hundred others might have been, quite unobserved by the slovenly collectors and republishers of our great dramatic writers. I allude to the following of Belvidera:—

'What wilt thou do? ah, do not kill me, Jaffier!
Pity these panting breasts, and trembling limbs,
That us'd to clasp thee when thy looks were milder,
* * * * * *
That yet hang heavy on my unpurg'd soul,
And plunge it not into eternal darkness.'

Before the last line but one, something was inserted as to the sins of her life, many yet recent, and certainly unatoned, which hung heavy upon her soul. Fancy may

range its fill in search of Otway's probable expression; but something must be supplied to help the meaning, though between hooks.

[Think of the many sins I have committed.]

The readiest and the best cure for these disorders upon the stage, is to cut them out; a process hardly felt in our old plays, for genius is ever abundant.

In the fifth act, Belvidera has now lost half her soul in the scene with her father Priuli. The tender adjuration, by her mother's virtues and her power of pleasing:—

'Look kindly on me; in my face behold
The lineaments of hers you 've kissed so often,
Pleading the cause of your poor cast-off child.'

The request to be laid when dead

'By the dear ashes of my tender mother;
She would have pitied me, had fate yet spar'd her—'

And that masterly description of what passed between Jaffier and herself. I extract but a tithe of the picture—

'He dragg'd me to the ground, and at my bosom
Presented horrid death; cried out, "My friends!
Where are my friends?" swore, wept, rag'd, threaten'd, lov'd,
For he yet lov'd, and that dear love preserv'd me
To this last trial of a father's pity.'

Epic poetry is sacred; no commentator, on the favourite pretext of interpolation, ever thought of cutting down the supplication of Priam to Achilles, certainly not more distinguished than this interview between Belvidera and Priuli for the genuine accents of Nature.

The actress did wonders with all that the prompter's copy had left her, but should have been allowed to use her own feeling as to what ought to be preserved. For the stage, what taste can be surer than that of a woman of sensibility, highly cultivated, with eloquence to convey all that she strongly feels?

The final scene of Jaffier and Belvidera abounds with emotions, from the heaviest sorrow up to frenzy. Our inimitable actress seized every point as it rose, and was truth itself in her delineation. With reference to her husband's question as to their wedding—

'But was't a miserable day?'

the misery to have heard it so termed, and the reluctance to articulate such sounds, were finely conceived. I ought to notice that the solemn blessing pronounced by Jaffier upon Belvidera is one of the most beautiful effusions ever combined by fancy and melancholy tenderness. The soliloquy, when Jaffier leaves her, called forth efforts from Mrs. Siddons which seemed to exceed the strength of woman—but who is ignorant of the passage and all its frantic horror? What admirable painting in these two lines!—

> 'The air's too thin, and pierces my weak brain;
> I long for thick substantial sleep.'

The fondness of the stage for an explosive exit retrenches in the representation Otway's expression of the deliquium into which Belvidera has fallen—from the horrors of central hell she has now wandered to a glorious death with her husband—

> 'Say not a word of this to my old father.
> Murmuring streams, soft shades, and springing flowers,
> Lutes, laurels, seas of milk, and ships of amber.'

The distraction which conducts to her end was without its eternal white satin dress, and then only did the action upon the ground, 'I'll dig, dig the den up,' appear more than mere noisy vehemence. So great was the impression of her Belvidera that the most jealous advocates for preceding excellence only mentioned the name of Mrs. Cibber.

I cannot leave the *chef-d'œuvre* of Otway without some notice of his death, which is affecting in its circumstances, however told. One account makes him expire at the Bull public-house, on Tower Hill, the 14th of April, 1685, of the effects of hunger. Dennis, the critic, told Spence that Otway had a friend named Blakiston, who was shot; Otway pursued the murderer in his flight towards Dover; on his return, violently heated, he inconsiderately drank water, which caused fever and killed him. He probably died, as it is stated, at the Bull, which might be one of his many haunts. All the 'aspiring thoughts and elegant desires' which made him passionately fond of Mrs. Barry,

led him to rival the profligate Rochester in her affections, and devote his muse to her celebrity, could stoop to a house of vulgar resort and sottish enjoyments. When Otway wrote Monimia for Mrs. Barry she was in the twenty-second year of her age, and had then been some time the pupil of Rochester. But Fate dropped the curtain upon his loves, his embarrassments, and his genius, at the early age of thirty-four. His genius increased with his years—*Venice Preserved* is greatly superior to his *Orphan*. In both, as Dryden said, 'the passions are truly touched—Nature is there, which is the greatest beauty.'

While the most perfect composition of tragedy was thus extending the fame of a great actress at one theatre, an experiment at the other was rendering the powers of Henderson and Miss Younge not merely useless but ridiculous. The son of the great scholar Bentley, although never positively successful in anything, had a strong opinion of his talent attached to him by such men even as Gray and Walpole. But there was something *bizarre* in all his attempts. If he aimed out of the common route, his aim was without force; his freedom was flippant, his style loose, his sentiments trite, and his dialogue familiar. He had died in October 1782, and had published, in 1767, a tragedy called *Philodāmus*, or as he tells us, in favour of an easier cadence, *Philŏdamus*. The courtship, the paternal vigilance and sagacity, the spousal preparations of this play, convulsed the house with laughter from the first scene to the last. A few specimens may amuse or surprise the reader. A father and a sovereign, in Asia, while disclosing some family interests to his freedman, thus breaks off—

> 'But see, my son! which cuts our time too short
> For more particulars.'

Nor is he less happy in the presence of his daughter, to whom he thus speaks relative to her lover Epicrates :—

> '*Phil.* For when I found that you received his visits,
> And with a kind of caution that imply'd
> We would not have the old man find us out—
> *Erato.* Will you but give me leave?
> *Phil.* Not till I 've done.'

This young lady on the point of marriage is thus congratulated by her brother: her reply is peculiar—

> 'All joy to thee, my dearest Erato!
> *Erato.* My brother, you felicitate but coolly.'

O the ardent expectations of these lovers!

> 'Now no more;
> Go to Euphemia, while we try Philodamus.'

I have room only for one of his sublimest figures, as he was much admired for his poetry—

> 'The peacock beauty, though it spread its state
> Quite to the tip-toe stretch of vanity,
> Wishes more eyes might stud its gaudy train.'

The puns in the third line will be often repeated, I imagine. I dare not predict the same of the following phrase—

> 'Scarce can life
> Cohabit with the tumult of my joy.'

The existence of that joy without its partner would be rather unusual. The instructions as to the nuptials which I spoke of shall close the subject:—

> 'Contract your transports, and retire a little,
> While they prepare this chamber for the ceremony
> That gives you to each other, once and ever.'

This play, printed elegantly in quarto for Dodsley, the author dedicated to her Majesty the Queen; but as from modesty he would not place her name where he withheld his own, he assigns to her virtues the second place in this kingdom, and ascribes to her a great share in those to which she yields the pre-eminence. Thus indicating the gracious person intended, according to the poetical rule laid down in the couplet of Pope—

> 'The same for ever! and describ'd by all
> With Truth and Goodness, as with Crown and Ball.'

Perhaps some of Doctor Bentley's criticism was compensated by his son's poetry; and *Philodamus* was the filial atonement for the father's outrage upon the *Paradise Lost.*

But, although Covent Garden derived no support from modern tragedy, it should be remembered that Henderson was always ready in the grand characters of Shakespeare;

always masterly and profound, subtle and discriminative; and that Mrs. Yates and Miss Younge sustained the heroines with powers undiminished hitherto by time. Drury Lane Theatre, relying upon the unparalleled attraction of Mrs. Siddons, became more than satisfied with Miss Farren; and allowed the comic wonder, Abington, to settle for the first time in the rival state. Her appearance now at Covent Garden produced, I remember, great sensation; her temperate vivacity, her keenness, her impersonation, her taste, her graceful manners, rendered her the peculiar delight of the fashionable world; they had long permitted her almost to legislate in dress, and my female readers may expect to be told in what array she presented herself to her old friends under this new and splendid roof. When she hurried on the stage, she was attired in a dress which their mothers deemed simple and characteristic of Lady Flutter; the train and petticoat were of white and silver stuff, the body and sash of a dark Carmelite satin, with short white sleeves. I recede with veneration from all attempts to describe what constituted then the upper half of the figure; but I may respectfully insinuate that Mrs. Abington, as to the surface, was not apt to allow the smallest spot to be under the undisputed control of Nature. As some compensation for this dedication of her personal charms to art, those of her acting were pure and lovely Nature indeed.

She spoke an address upon this occasion, very probably her own, of which one point excited a titter among those who did and those who did not understand the French language:—

> 'Neither the hoyden, rough from Congreve's lays,
> Unknowing in French manners and French phrase,
> Who, conscious of no crime in speaking plain,
> Will bawl out smock for *chemise de la Reine.*'

The Discovery, in which she now appeared as Lady Flutter, was a comedy which she had been taught to esteem by its success under Garrick. That great master had rendered Sir Anthony Brainville attractive by a perfect negation of all the qualities which distinguished himself as an actor. All the smartness of his manner, the quickness

of his turn, the pungency of his utterance, and the brilliancy of his expression were now smothered in cotton, reduced to the most insipid and polished imbecility. Henderson, in following Mr. Garrick, like him, laid himself completely aside. He spoke nasally, and was, in truth, a picture of nothing, astonishingly like.

I notice here the first strong indication of what extended theatres were bringing upon us. Mrs. Sheridan's *Discovery* now began to look languid; it was called a five-volumed novel. We were hastening into the rapid school—travelling, like barbarians, back from the ear to the eye, and only to be kept awake by the incessant flutter of action. O'Keefe had now established himself in comic opera as well as farce; and *The Castle of Andalusia* had completely fortified his *Banditti*, routed the year before totally on their first appearance. Whether he made any use of D'Urfey's play with the same title I have not been idle enough to ascertain.

I return to Drury Lane Theatre. Their Majesties, when visiting the theatres, hardly ever ventured upon tragedy. The king himself enjoyed a hearty laugh at his favourite comedian; and indeed comedy associated most naturally with the joyous occasion which gave the sovereign and his family to the grateful welcome of his people.[1] But Mrs. Siddons had penetrated the circle at Buckingham House, and in the month of January 1783 the royal party saw her in all her characters. There was an ardour in this patronage that showed the deep impression she had made. On the 2nd her Euphrasia was graced by majesty; on the 9th her Belvidera; on the 20th her Calista; on the 23rd her Shore; and on the 28th her Isabella. Even the offensive politics of the manager vanished before the charms of the new sovereign of the stage.

> 'Hic templum ingens Siddonia
> Condebat, donis opulentum et numine Divæ.'

Among the higher orders she had become an unfailing topic of inquiry and praise: they were anxious to know all

[1] The favourite comedian of his late Majesty was Mr. Quirk, an actor of very great and peculiar merit, and a most diligent and faithful servant of the public.

the preparations for effects so powerful, her modes of study, the discipline of her mind; and the actress replied with temper and modesty to many questions at which she must internally have smiled. Lady L—— was said, currently, to have gone at once to the grand secret by a question which might have been clothed in less alarming words. 'Pray, Madam, when you are to prepare yourself in a character, what is your primary object of attention, the superstructure, as it may be called, or the foundation of the part?'

Now, a character being written, that is, the superstructure reared by the poet, it seems to be difficult to arrive at all at the foundation of the character but through this very superstructure: in other words, the actions declare the passions from which they spring. These 'blue beans in a blue bladder' produced, I have heard, a pause of some length; however, the actress could not but be intelligible, and her reply showed the sort of meaning she fancied in the question. 'When a part is first put before me for study, I look it over in a general way to see if it is in Nature, and if it is, I am sure it can be played.'

As to her mode of study, in her apartment it was silent. She conceived there certainly all that she meant to do; but it was only at rehearsal that she knew the effect of voice upon the conception. For some time after her return to town she was fond of having the experience of old Mr. Sheridan to confirm her own judgment; but he went to the theatre with her, 'where alone,' she said, 'she could show him exactly what she could do at night.'

Having thus incidentally mentioned Mr. Sheridan, who was an excellent theorist certainly, I take leave to notice his Rhetorical Prelections (for the title of Lowth's incomparable labours might be easier attained than his genius and taste), by which he vainly hoped to impress the people with the dignity of his art. At the west end of the town he used what was called Hickford's great room, in Brewer Street, Golden Square. There perhaps he collected from about one hundred to two hundred friends and amateurs to hear his course of lectures in three divisions; and there assuredly the clergy might learn to give more exact impres-

sion to the Liturgy, the senator more dignity to his harangue, and the poet more music to his verse. He made considerable effect in the speeches of our Demosthenes, Lord Chatham, and of his Grecian prototype. Much of the Church Service, too, he stripped of the usual nasal monotony, and settled the emphasis by a sound logic. In poetry I consider him to have made more of the *Alexander's Feast* and the famous *Elegy* by Gray than even very attentive readers could have discovered. He had all the confidence that the stage alone can bestow, much love for his art, and a long life bestowed upon it. I thought he rather sunk under Milton; and, though he was fully aware of the slight suspensive pause at the end of the line where the sense was carried into another, yet the verses were often too little made out for their perfect charm. Mrs. Siddons and her sister, the late Mrs. Twiss, attended him—his friend Henderson, too, occasionally; and the knowledge that they did so aided his own attraction; a fact which he may be excused for not having himself discovered.

Like the Lord Chief-Justice, he carried his judgment from Westminster into the City, and perhaps succeeded the debaters at Coachmakers' Hall. The filthy state of its floors and benches frighted the refined part of the sex from an unnecessary attempt to improve their natural eloquence.

It was before remarked that Mrs. Ward was a very poor second to Mrs. Siddons. Indeed where, as in Alicia, youth and beauty and high accomplishments were to be inferred, a variety of allusions became incredible. With respect to this sort of verisimilitude on the stage, the perfections themselves must be in the actress, or that earnest passion which prevents the perception of their want. Where even this soul of tragedy exists in no striking degree we can bear to hear a fine woman talk of her beauty, and without a glance of correction upon homely features; but some excellence must be visible or the privilege is refused.

On the 6th of January Miss Kemble, a sister of Mrs. Siddons, acted, for the first time in London, the above rival of Shore. In my life of their brother I have remarked upon the

cruelty and the impolicy of bringing the sisters to the same theatre; it was unlikely that there should be no resemblance—rather that there should not be even a strong one—in person, voice, and manner. The charm of contrasted excellence, therefore, was not likely to be found in them. If Miss Kemble was superior to Mrs. Siddons she destroyed her sister; if she was inferior her affinity placed her on a worse footing than another contemporary would have occupied. In family competitions of the same sex the second place is nothing.

This lady is no more;—that circumstance, however, neither will nor need to influence my opinion of her. She had many fine qualities. Her mind was exceedingly cultivated, her person well formed, her face beautiful, her eye remarkably brilliant—but she was not a great actress—her powers were destroyed by her diffidence; she did not interest by her softness, she did not terrify by her rage; but still the requisites were so obvious that her failure excited astonishment. When I say failure, I mean only as to the reaching the point of her own hope and the expectation of her friends.

Mrs. Abington had long decided upon a revival of *The Scornful Lady*, a comedy by Beaumont and Fletcher; and Cooke the barrister made for her an alteration of the play, with the address that might be expected from the author of *The Elements of Dramatic Criticism*. He changed the epithet for the fair heroine, who was now only the 'capricious.' The modern Thalia acted the lady without the sanguinary results attending her performance by Mrs. Oldfield. The beaux of her time wore swords at the theatre, and Beau Fielding received a thrust from the weapon of a Mr. Fulwood, twelve inches deep. Out of kindness to Mrs. Oldfield the latter left the place after the disturbance; but having thus 'fleshed his sword' for the evening, he retired to the other theatre, where, singling out an old antagonist, Captain Cusack, he demanded immediate satisfaction for some former offence—the gentlemen hurried to the field of honour, and the expecting audience were speedily informed that Fulwood was killed on the spot, and that the Captain declined all the public honours of his achievement.

Mrs. Abington restored the comedy of Fletcher to all its former fame, and the renewed experiments and detections between the Elder Loveless and his capricious lady were a source of rich entertainment to the audience. Sir Roger, the curate, was the only character omitted in the present play; it is now, thank decency, totally unclerical here; and with him vanished much of the ribaldry which had delighted our ancestors. Nothing could be better than the Elder Loveless of Wroughton. It may be worth noticing that the costume of James's reign was strictly attended to in the dresses of the characters; and I remember the enjoyment of Mrs. Abington, in a high ruff and a rich silver silk edged with black velvet.

I take the liberty to censure in this place a very mischievous tone of criticism which began now to be prevalent in the daily press. Certain flimsy but authoritative writers, with a view, perhaps, at best to recommend themselves to the leading performers of both houses, affected a sovereign contempt for the writings of men honoured by the ablest judgments; and the public were told that such stuff as the plays cited was only rendered bearable by the powers of the reigning favourites. The incense of such jargon fumed daily before Mrs. Siddons as well as others, but I believe her own impressions of the poets' merit were little disturbed by these flights of impudence. She knew that from Mrs. Elizabeth Barry to herself their characters had always been great in the hands of adequate performers; and that, if they ever did fail in their effect, the cause of that failure was not in the author. One play in particular had been loaded with this despicable sort of commentary—I mean *The Mourning Bride* of Congreve—his pantomime, as it was styled in the cant of the times. This play, notwithstanding, Mrs. Siddons selected for her second benefit.

As the application of the term pantomime to this tragedy is intended for disparagement, it may be as well to look a little at its meaning, in order to judge how far it applies to the play in question. The pantomime is a dramatic entertainment where everything is shown in action. As a censure, therefore, it implies that the play, however aided

by speech, retains too much of this character—that it is a show, and little but a show. If the critics mean that this tragedy is more complex in its action than perhaps the French stage admits, this as an objection applies equally to the whole series of English authors, and to Shakespeare very particularly indeed. So picturesque and various are the situations of that great poet, so intelligent his dumb show, abstracted from all speech, that he might be almost styled the painter's poet, and the deaf can never fail to comprehend the full scope of his exhibitions. It remains, therefore, to examine how Congreve stands with respect to the other nerves of the drama—description, sentiment, and passion. As to verbal description, in the opinion of Dr. Johnson, he has the most expressive passage in English literature. It is given to his Almeria, the character from its gentleness best suited to the placid eloquence of description. It is the impression made by a Gothic cathedral on the sensitive mind. *Decies repetita placebit* :—

> 'How reverend is the face of this tall pile,
> Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads,
> To bear aloft its arch'd and pond'rous roof,
> By its own weight made steadfast and immovable,
> Looking tranquillity. It strikes an awe
> And terror on my aching sight: the tombs
> And monumental caves of death look cold,
> And shoot a chillness to my trembling heart.
> Give me thy hand, and let me hear thy voice;
> Nay, quickly speak to me, and let me hear
> Thy voice. My own affrights me with its echoes.'

But Congreve, as a poet, has a seat the proudest that a poet can occupy; nor should we be indifferent to a sentiment because, from the hour it was first heard, it has flowed from the lips of every woman at all tinctured with letters. I allude to his eulogy on music:—

> 'Music has charms,' etc.

His fancy and his sentiment, as Shakespeare says, 'mingle' frequently 'their spurs together':

> 'The circling hours that gather all the woes,
> Which are diffus'd thro' the revolving year,
> Come heavy laden with th' oppressing weight
> To me; with me successively they leave

The sighs, the tears, the groans, the restless cares,
And all the damps of grief that did retard their flight;
They shake their downy wings, and scatter all
The dire collected dues on my poor head;
Then fly with joy and swiftness from me.'

The fond astonishment of Osmyn bursts into language beyond measure beautiful:—

'Rivet and nail me where I stand, ye Powers,
That motionless I may be still deceiv'd.
Let me not stir, nor breathe, lest I dissolve
That tender lovely form of painted air,
So like Almeria.'

'But the reader in these passages is reminded of Shakespeare!' Need Congreve shrink from the competition?

For the glow of feminine transport was anything ever written with more sweetness, delicacy, and pathos, than the following?—

'O, how hast thou return'd? How hast thou charm'd
The wildness of the waves and rocks to this?
That thus relenting, they have giv'n thee back
To earth, to light, and life, to love and me!'

But Congreve added regularity of fable to all his other merits, and a truly excellent critic long since observed that the usual censure upon our drama did not apply to him. 'From the foregoing censure must be excepted *The Mourning Bride* of Congreve, where regularity concurs with the beauty of sentiment and language to make it one of the most complete pieces England has to boast of.'[1]

I therefore call for an attentive reconsideration of this neglected tragedy. I do not mean as to the stage, for now we could not act it—but in the closet; to which I find his comedies have been condemned by the flippant school, on the pretence of their indecency. If the free passages in this author were expunged, would all comedy, from his day to ours, equal the wit remaining, even in quantity? But he was a first-rate genius in everything, and perhaps few of my readers know that he has bestowed the utmost beauty upon a trifle such as the candle burning before a lover contemplating the perfections of his mistress. The terms chosen will be found to apply equally to the principal and

[1] Ld. Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, vol. iii. p. 324. (Edin. 1763.)

the representative subject. This is the character of his wit and all true wit. But in a purely dramatic treatise its place must be a note.[1]

Lest the reader should suspect my impartiality, I will point out one instance where the imperfect expression of the author's idea renders even the solemnity of prayer itself ludicrous. It is in the first scene of his third act, where Osmyn reads a paper in the handwriting of his father, which that graceless spouter Dick, the Apprentice, converts into a note of hand. The venerable man would pray that the number of mercies bestowed by heaven upon his son may double that of the hairs which sorrow rends from his own aged head. As the poet has left it, he invokes for him only a twofold quantity of hair, *e.g.*:—

> 'Let every hair, which sorrow by the roots
> Tears from my hoary and devoted head,
> Be doubled in thy mercies to my son.'

Another objection I make to a part of his catastrophe—It was necessary to Congreve that his king should be found headless; as Cloten decapitated is, in Shakespeare, mistaken

[1] TO A CANDLE.

ELEGY.

> 'Thou watchful taper, by whose silent light
> I lonely pass the melancholy night;
> Thou faithful witness of my secret pain,
> To whom alone I venture to complain;
> O learn with me my hopeless love to moan;
> Commiserate a life so like thy own.
> Like thine, my flames to my destruction turn,
> Wasting that heart, by which supply'd they burn.
> Like thine, my joy and suffering they display,
> At once are signs of life, and symptoms of decay.
> And as thy fearful flames the day decline,
> And only during night presume to shine;
> Their humble rays not daring to aspire
> Before the sun, the fountain of their fire:
> So mine, with conscious shame and equal awe,
> To shades obscure and solitude withdraw;
> Nor dare their light before her eyes disclose,
> From whose bright beams their being first arose.'

Here we have none of the perverse ingenuity of the metaphysical poets. The points of contact seem obvious, and not to be missed; but such a parallel, so continued and so exact, was never made out before.

for Posthumus: but Congreve's king is haggled in a disgusting manner by the officious cunning of a creature of his favourite. In *Cymbeline* Guiderius, who had been assailed by Cloten dressed like Posthumus, is told by him that he is the queen's son; but this circumstance, so far from alarming the young hero, he treats thus contemptuously:—

> 'I have sent Cloten's clotpole down the stream
> In embassy to his mother: his body's hostage
> For his return.'

One is the result of a fair combat in times comparatively barbarous. In all other parts of Congreve's business the manners are refined. To disgust in tragedy is almost fatal. The very stratagem of a king's hiding himself to surprise and reproach his mistress is below the dignity of tragedy, though countenanced by Addison as far as disguising Sempronius in the Numidian garb of Juba.

But even Congreve may detain us too long when Mrs. Siddons is waiting. I hasten to examine what his Zara and her representative reciprocally did for each other. The character is admirably described by its author, in the person of Osmyn. She has a soul of an intrepid and commanding cast, that challenges esteem even where she cannot be loved. Her personal are equal to her mental charms—but her passions are more furious than the winds, and uproot and scatter her virtues, as the hurricane ploughs the ocean and rears its waters into mountains of destruction. I can safely say that such a being Mrs. Siddons was on the first night of her Zara—but these are the mere outlines of the delineation; they were filled up as firmly as they were drawn.

On her entrance as a captive, the glance upon her chains, and the remark upon captivity, expressed the quality of her mind admirably:—

> 'But when I feel
> These bonds, I look with loathing on myself.'

Still more impressive, because steadier, was the ensuing acknowledgment—

> 'Such thanks as one hating to be oblig'd—
> Yet hating more ingratitude—can pay,
> I offer.'

Her eagerness to cover the indiscretion of Osmyn, and explain favourably a rather ambiguous exclamation of his —her throwing in the word Heli, in answer to the king, were skilful in the extreme.

The ninth scene, after Almeria has quitted Osmyn—her manner of coming in upon his meditation—

> 'See where he stands, folded and fix'd to earth,
> Stiff'ning in thought; a statue among statues'—

the tender expostulation, warming into reproach, and flaming into menace, with all the winning and alarming gradations of language, till the distinct proposal of herself to him is ultimately tried, and on his rejection of freedom and her love, she exclaims—

> 'Thou can'st not mean so poorly as thou talk'st'—

were as truly displayed by the actress as they are suggested by the author. Nor was she less delightful when her self-love made her detect the passion of Osmyn, but mistake its object, till she settles in the conviction that her charms have 'pierced his very soul,' but that his dastard nature recoils from the danger of becoming a rival to the king.

The following act shows a remission of her anger, and however he shall decide as to her love, she considers herself bound to restore to him that liberty of which her charge to the king had deprived him. How beautifully she extenuates her fault!—

> 'Can'st thou forgive me, then? wilt thou believe
> So kindly of my fault to call it madness?
> O give that madness yet a milder name,
> And call it passion; then be still more kind,
> And call that passion love.'

But the film that self-love has drawn over her eyes is forcibly dispelled in the third act, when, about to visit Osmyn, she is requested to suspend her entrance until the Princess Almeria shall have retired. At first she dissembles with him, and then insults him coolly; but upon his exclaiming—

> 'You do not come to mock my miseries?'

She says fiercely—'I do': and loads him with the most opprobrious language. To her threat of procuring his death, Osmyn calmly replies, 'I thank you.' The points now come home in their altercation, and are admirably contrasted—

> '—Thou ly'st; for now I know for whom thou'dst live.
> *Osm.* Then you may know for whom I 'd die.'

Zara is now in the highest state of exasperation, and the actress looked the truism with which she concludes the act—

> 'Heav'n has no rage like love to hatred turn'd,
> Nor Hell a fury like a woman scorn'd.'

If the sorrows of Almeria had then moved in the majestic form and silver tones of Mrs. Yates, the perfect contrast of two women so accomplished, with even the Osmyn of Smith, would have carried imperial tragedy higher than it probably ever went in any age or nation.

The author has, however, avoided any scene of personal struggle between his heroines, though I think he would have left Rowe a model that might have saved him from the disgraceful ravings of Alicia. The plot now proceeds with great haste, and the ultimate feelings of Zara are consoling. She swallows the poison deliberately, which she supposes will unite her to Osmyn, and the actress was excellently 'studied in her death'—perhaps no performer ever threw so much variety into the close of dramatic existence.

Having now, I trust, shown this pantomime to be replete with description, sentiment, and passion, I turn to another class of objectors, who, admitting all these, contend we have too much of them, and find ourselves in consequence more pained than pleased. But the abundance of Congreve must not be supposed to diminish the lustre of his figures or sentiments; they are admirable however numerous.

> 'Men doubt, because they stand so thick i' the sky,
> If those be stars which paint the galaxy.'

But in all such cases it is we who should endeavour to rise

to the affluence of the poet, rather than wish him brought down to the penury of our ideas. The crowded thoughts and splendid diction of Shakespeare must not, for vulgar apprehension, be lowered into the homely chat of Heywood.

CHAPTER XII

THE management of Drury Lane Theatre, in allowing Mrs. Siddons an extra night in the month of March 1783, had, in fact, given but little out of their own funds, though, from the great extent of her fashionable connection, they put the actress in the receipt of a large accession to her established salary. On this night seven rows of the pit were laid into the boxes, and her book, as it lay open in the lobby, was literally the Court Guide.

That benefit produced to Mrs. Siddons no less a sum than £650, but then Lady Spencer gave 90 guineas for her side box, and Lady Aylesbury a bank-note of £50 for an upper box.

A desire to preserve all reasonable continuity in this narrative has compelled me to omit, in the series of dramatic events, some that claim this supplemental record. On the 14th of January expired a very prominent character, the delight of former times, whose cognomen was the sign of merriment and the prelude of harmony. The reader, to be sure, anticipates the person of Old Cervetto, who, at the age of one hundred and two, resigned all the noisy honours of his nose. He played the double bass in the band for many years, and was the father of the great violoncello player. He came to England in the year of the hard frost, and was then an old man. I am afraid his successors in the orchestra have been but slightly accomplished to succeed him; but under the original call for Nosy, or Nozée, his fame yet survives, though that of the trunkmaker excites no longer noise among us.

Mr. Cumberland has a name in the drama which demands attention to every effort not very much below

himself. *The Mysterious Husband*, acted at Covent Garden on the 28th of January, is in many respects one of his best productions. Before the play went into rehearsal, he brought it to Henderson's house to read it to him. Mrs. Henderson, with a very natural feeling, exclaimed to him: 'Well, Mr. Cumberland, I hope at last you will allow Mr. Henderson to be good for something on the stage.' 'Madam,' replied the poet, 'I can't afford it—a villain he must be.' And, to be sure, of all the causeless depravity in the great moral massacre of the English tragedy, the character of Lord Davenant, in the present play, affords the completest specimen. It seems to have been suggested by Lord Orford's *Mysterious Mother*, which had been printed in 1768 at Strawberry Hill, and presented to his friends, with the express stipulation that neither Garrick nor Dr. Johnson should be permitted to read it. The Doctor would call this a 'very angry, but unnecessary prohibition.' It would severely mortify Mr. Garrick, who, however idly, hoped for universal esteem.

I do not wonder that Walpole, when, in 1781, he consented to a publication of this play from his own copy, pronounced a subject so horrid unsuited to the stage; and it should be remembered that, in horrors, *The Mysterious Mother* greatly transcends either Phædra or Jocasta. But the nervous dignity of its composition will for ever delight in the closet. Yet, when we have in the mind's eye such an actress as Mrs. Siddons, it is impossible to read some of its passages without attempting to conceive the astonishing effect they must receive from her look and utterance. The fifth scene of the first act, where an artful friar is endeavouring to worm out the cause of her remorse that he may be master of her wealth, offers a few points that are irresistible, among many that are fine.

'*Bened.* The Church could seal
Your pardon, but you scorn it. In your pride
Consists your danger. Yours are pagan virtues.
Countess. Father, my crimes are pagan: my belief
Too orthodox to trust to erring man.'

When the reader who has known this magician in her strength has a little considered the effect of one word in

this reply, he may be disposed to go on with her in a speech so calculated for her powers—

> 'What ! shall I, foul with guilt, and self-condemn'd,
> Presume to kneel where angels kneel appall'd,
> And plead a priest's certificate for pardon?
> While he, perchance, before my blasted eyes
> Shall sink to woes endless, unutterable,
> For having fool'd me into that presumption.
> *Bened.* Is he to blame, trusting to what he grants?
> *Countess.* Am I to blame, not trusting what he grants?'

Nor is the power of the poet at all weakened to the very end of the first act; where, with some of the forms and more of the spirit, he adopts the interrogative style of Cato to Labienus in the ninth book of Lucan. Of its forms in the outset:

> '*Countess.* Good father, wherefore? what should I inquire?
> Must I be taught of him, that guilt is woe;
> That innocence alone is happiness?'

Of its spirit about the middle of her speech:

> 'We want no preacher to distinguish vice
> From virtue. At our birth the god reveal'd
> All conscience needs to know.'[1]

As Mr. Cumberland chose a slighter degree of incest for the subject of his play, I wish he had not written it in prose, and that, with the dexterity of Walpole, he had thrown the occurrence back a few centuries. In hearing or reading the vices of another and distant age, we have a twofold consolation: an involuntary suspicion that the facts may never have been true; and a voluntary belief, that our own times exhibit nothing like them.

A slight sketch of the interest will illustrate and justify

[1] 'Quid quæri, Labiene, jubes? an liber in armis
Occubuisse velim, potius quam regna videre?
An noceat vis ulla bono?' etc.

* * * * *

'Nil agimus nisi sponte dei, non vocibus ullis
Numen eget, dixitque semel nascentibus autor
Quicquid scire licet.'

Pharsal., Lib. IX.

Rowe, though even alarmingly paraphrastical, has done this whole speech of Cato with the vigour and majestic ease of Dryden himself.

this remark. Davenant, already a widower, marries the daughter of Sir Edmund Travers; she had a former attachment, but his lordship gets his rival a ship, and sends him upon a distant discovery, perhaps to the North Pole. In a ramble to Spa, Davenant meets with the sister of this very Captain, and under another name marries her. After a short cohabitation he quits her, and from Paris transmits to her an account of his own death. The second wife, conceiving herself a widow, comes to England, and marries clandestinely the son of Davenant. On the morning of her marriage, she accidentally sees her first husband, his father. The circumstances are at length disclosed by Lady Davenant to the 'precious villain,' her husband, who from desperation destroys himself, and so removes the only bar to the happiness of the survivors. Yet the sort of happiness is enviable, and should be preserved as a dramatic rarity. Dormer, the discoverer, comes back to take the command of the real Lady Davenant, and the son has to forget, if possible, that his father was born before him.

Henderson was amazingly terrible with all these horrors about him; and Miss Younge delightful in the suffering and excellent Lady Davenant. She had a sensible patience in her composition, a dignity in misfortune quite unaffected: and in all her range, and it was a very wide one, never shone more than in the meek endurance of a brutal or profligate husband. This it was that almost rendered her sublime in the Countess of Narbonne. Sir Edmund Travers, a character of odd humour, acted by Yates in this play, showed a peculiar comedy, which we now happily preserve in Dowton: from its chasteness it will combine with tragedy, at a proper distance from the catastrophe.

On the following night Mr. Pratt, whose *Fair Circassian* has been mentioned, followed up his serious success by a comic failure; it was called *The School for Vanity*. Among the extraordinary events, a baronet is saved from drowning by an alderman (!) of the name of Ingot. Such an incident passed even dramatic credibility. 'For the water swells a man, and what a thing should I have been when I had been swoln! I should have been a mountain of mummy.'

Miss Farren performed a very tender orphan, named Ophelia, and Miss Philips (her real fate too) had a swain insensible to her beauty; a song thrown into the part was much admired—but the school broke up for a long vacation, when the tiresome lesson of vanity ended.

Miss E. Kemble, another sister of Mrs. Siddons, made an appearance in Portia, notwithstanding 'her greater' had done so little in it seven years before. This lady more resembled Mrs. Siddons in her person and countenance than Miss Kemble did, and was certainly a better actress. However, she was not brought so forward in the arrangements of the theatre; and, if I am correct, only once repeated Portia, and then was untroubled by the call-boy for the rest of the season. Her elder sister, Frances, beside the tragic seconds to the Siddons, was one night tried in Beatrice; but the audience were rather cruel, for their censure anticipated the first sentence pronounced by her.

The reader will easily imagine that these ladies could not expect to be received upon the footing of their actual merits. They were thwarted by the fears of the whole dramatic body. If the influence of Mrs. Siddons equalled her talent, what was to be expected but an invasion of her whole family, male and female, which, as it was certainly numerous, would swallow up all business worth doing in the theatre? At Drury Lane Theatre it was now known that Mr. Kemble might be expected, and that from his provincial success he would occupy the first place in tragedy or none. When we consider, therefore, the jealousy peculiar to this profession, and the interest, equally peculiar, that it excites in others, we can see no inconsiderable numbers among the frequenters of the play-house strongly prejudiced against the family.

It is very natural for a lady addicted to dramatic composition to look to the authors of her own sex with partiality. It is thus we see the *Bold Stroke for a Wife* of Mrs. Centlivre suggesting to Mrs. Cowley *A Bold Stroke for a Husband*—a comedy which she brought out at Covent Garden Theatre on the 25th of February, 1783. This

play labours with two distinct interests, which a very little attention might have woven into each other. One of them is the common girlish expedient of disgusting a variety of known suitors in favour of one unknown. The pleasantest point here was the father locking the daughter up, and upon his leaving the room, her lover starting suddenly from his concealment. The girl, upon her surprise, screams aloud; while the father is heard on the stairs to say, 'Ay, ay, you may scream, but there you shall stay, Miss,' or something like it. The other is the trite expedient (I mean on the stage, for in real life nothing, perhaps, of the sort ever occurred) of a neglected wife going *en cavalier* to her husband's mistress to learn how to captivate. The mistress naturally falling in love with this wife, who can play to the life any part but her own, in her fondness possesses her of all the 'conveyances' which her husband had made to the prejudice of his family.

It is a common observation that the writings of the ladies do not shun the broadest latitude taken by the other sex; and so indifferent, for the most part, do they seem to their peculiar interests, that they luxuriate in the description of a gay agreeable profligate. They would inspire constancy, but they paint the rover: in their most perfect characters the heart always pants for pleasure. But this I learn is the creed, as well as practice, among the dramatists of the fair sex. The female friend who sketches the character of Mrs. Behn speaks out upon the subject: 'She was a woman of sense, and consequently a lover of pleasure.' We have had four ladies eminent among our comic writers —Behn, Centlivre, Cowley, and Inchbald; and a not very rigid moralist would strike out much from the writings of each of them.

I presume an admirer of either lady, who had composed and addressed a poem called the 'Comic Muse,' would have incurred no blame. Russel, the author of a *History of Modern Europe*, and other ingenious works, now published a poem called the 'Tragic Muse,' with which he complimented Mrs. Siddons. He was severely reproved by the critics for 'wasting his verse upon excellence that was in its nature fugitive, the meteor of the moment.' A more

liberal feeling might have applauded even an endeavour to give some little fame beyond the memories of contemporary admirers. There is something grateful in the very notion that verse is trying to repay some of the charm it has derived from the organs of the actress. And surely if, in the language of either Cibber or Lloyd or Sheridan, the art of the great actor leaves no memorial, unlike every other effort of genius, we are doubly called upon to perpetuate what we can of gifts so singularly circumscribed; not as some would represent them, the mere mimicry of man, but arising out of the most vivid imagination of his nature, passions, and habits, and a power of becoming steadily all that the fancy suggests as constituting any individual existence.

Mrs. Siddons having acted for the benefits of the four leading actors in tragedy, Messrs. Smith, Palmer, Bensley, and Brereton, during her first brilliant season, on the 19th of May performed Shore for the Theatrical Fund. This was followed by a repetition of Zara on her sister's night; and on the fifth of June, with Isabella, for the twenty-third time, the doors of Drury Lane play-house

'Shut up in measureless content.'

In looking to the comparative popularity of the characters acted by Mrs. Siddons, the triumph was unquestionably with Southerne's Isabella, which she played twenty-two times in her first season. Rowe, to his Jane Shore and Calista, had of each fourteen performances; Otway's exquisite Belvidera had thirteen repetitions; Murphy eleven for his *Grecian Daughter*; Congreve's Zara was acted thrice, and she kept her friend Hull's *Fatal Interview* alive till the author's third day: neither his own merits nor those of his heroine could do more for this weak imitation of Lillo in prose. We are here presented with the astonishing total of eighty performances in one season of characters full of emotion and fatigue, an effort beyond any parallel, and as to excellence beyond all praise.

Nor was any rest allowed our charming actress. On the 9th of June, in company with the Breretons, she set off post for Ireland; the party took up F. Aickin by the

way, and pursued their journey to the sister kingdom. She was now anxious to join her brother, Mr. Kemble, who had already signed an article for three years with the proprietors of Drury Lane Theatre.

We have now leisure to turn ourselves to look at the Haymarket, with its grand and 'little' theatres; and as all foreign concerns, to this or any other work, should be out of the way as speedily as possible, we shall look first at that shameless prodigy the Opera House. A few months only are past since I read some motion or other respecting the late proprietor, Mr. Taylor; I have now under my eye a notice, heading the bill of the night, in that year, 1783, calling his creditors together to meet the trustees of the concern. He was then in such a state as to be utterly unable to go on; but, on 'a certain ground,' he permitted the performers to continue the entertainments for their own advantage from the 22nd of May to the end of the season. The nobility and gentry had already given one subscription for the relief of the deluded artists, who had come over in the fair exercise of first-rate talents; and a second was now set on foot, at five guineas for twelve operas. I have brought these two facts together that the reader may reflect upon the mysteries of equity, by which a shuffling concern can thus be kept litigiously alive for forty years together.

In the season of 1782-3, the opera was crowded to excess. One o'clock in the morning did not see the Haymarket clear of the carriages, and the stage had every fascination both in the serious and comic opera. Pacchierotti, the most pathetic singer in the world, was executing the divine music of Sarti—perhaps not fully supported as to a first woman—for neither Carnevale nor Morigi had sufficient power for so great a master, and they slighted the recitativo, a thing inexcusable indeed in Italians who know its value. But, what so seldom happens, the comic opera was now quite equal in attraction to the serious. The graceful hilarity and taste of Viganoni were seconded by a *prima buffa* whom no time has approached in all the requisites, I mean the Allegranti. In ballet there was Le Picq and Slingsby, and for their ladies Rossi; and Theodore, who was the



Allegranti of the dance. The house itself, too, had been enlarged, and rendered splendid beyond everything known. His present Majesty, then Prince of Wales, graced it frequently by his presence, with other branches of his illustrious family, and the principal nobility had boxes; and yet, from the hard and dogged vulgarity of one man, who had got into the property, nothing but disgrace and ruin attended the concern.

The 'little manager' as he delighted to style himself,[1] but who occupied no small space in the eye of taste, was this season induced to beautify his pigmy palace. The friendly journals celebrated his balustrades and his pillars, his paper and his paint, not forgetting his frontispiece, with its new motto, of which the ominous word *serpentem* was omitted, and the spectator read only:

'Spectas, et tu spectabere.'

Our recent encampments all over the country suggested a military allusion on his opening. As an article, certainly from Colman, it merits preservation. He begins with his triumph in the recent publication of the *Art of Poetry*.

INTELLIGENCE EXTRAORDINARY.

(From the Camp just forming in the Haymarket.)

Town Major Colman, who has just given the public a very elegant Theory of his Art, will reduce it into practice by opening the summer campaign with some of the best troops that can be mustered from the two garrisons which have been on duty during the course of the winter, as well as others from country cantonments.

The following is the disposition of the encampment:—

Major General Palmer is to head the principal division, in which he is to be supported by Colonels Aickin. Bensley, Bannister, jun. etc.

The Hah! hah! Pioneers to consist of Captains Edwin, Parsons, Wewitzer, Baddeley, Massey, and R. Palmer.

This corps will likewise be joined by Captain Wilson, who, in consequence of many gallant engagements had received a violent

[1] 'Small though his talents, smaller than his size,
Beneath your smiles his little Lares rise.'
Prol. at opening.

contusion in his leg, but is now so well recovered as to be able to stand to his duty.

The heavy cavalry will be led by the Webbes, two officers of as much personal weight as any in the field.

The light troops by Mrs. Bulkeley, Mrs. Wilson, Mrs. Wells, Miss Hale, etc.

Necessary woman to the Buskin and Sock Heroines, Mrs. Poussin.

The band of music to be composed of Messrs. Bannister, Brett, Wood, Mrs. Bannister and Miss George from the pipe office, Oxford.

Besides the above band, several outdoor trumpeters will occasionally entertain the town with the celebrated anthem of 'Te dominum theatri laudamus.'

Chasseurs and Light Infantry, Master and Miss Byrne, etc. etc.

For an account of the names of the Artillery, that is to say, thunder and lightning men, rain-showerers, camp-shifters, etc. *vide* the orderly books of the company.

N.B. The site of the old Camp is considerably enlarged, by removing the pallisados, etc. The tents are all new painted; and the whole encampment, under the direction of the able engineer Rooker, cuts a very brilliant and soldier-like appearance.'

And thus, in those days, a manager could show his company before and behind the curtain that he had the right of wit to entertain them, and affirm his judgment as to the efforts of other authors by his own powers of performance.

Colman knew how contemptible the new theatrical disease was, of altering boxes and avenues, and calling the thing a new theatre. Though he felt himself, according to the laws of proportion, bound to vie with his antagonists in this vanity of the art, he yet taught his own audiences to laugh at it on his first night of opening:—

> 'What tho' our house be three-score years of age,
> Let us new-vamp the box, new-lay the stage;
> Long paragraphs shall paint, with proud parade,
> The gilded front, and airy balustrade;
> While on each post the flaming bill displays,
> Our old new theatre, and new old plays.'

The Miss George alluded to proved a very pleasing singer and very respectable actress. One of the earliest novelties produced by the manager was a comedy called *A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed*!—a first and only dramatic attempt by Mr. D. O'Brien, so well known as the

zealous friend of Charles Fox. It produced some public altercation between Mr. Colman and the author, and eight nights' performance but slightly connected with each other. A ninth night was at length yielded by the manager, to verify the title, and then this *rara avis* suddenly disappeared. O'micron Brien yielded to O'mega Keefe. *The Young Quaker* of the latter, the loves of Reuben Sadboy and Dinah Primrose, amused the town and seem to have strongly interested the manager, for he wrote both prologue and epilogue himself.

O'Keefe wrote a trifle in two acts for the birthday of the Prince of Wales (our present most gracious sovereign) called *The Prince of Arragon*; and the compliment paid is that, the royalty about him undeclared, he is preferred to the presumed Prince. The great personage to whom this tribute was paid always announced his rank in his appearance.

On the 19th of August a comedy in two acts was brought out for Mrs. Bulkeley's benefit, called *The Lawyer*; who, as a critic of the day said, with as much *naïveté* as truth, drew tears from all present.

I cannot allow this season to close without stating the very singular pleasure I received from seeing, on the 12th of September, that masterwork of Jonson, *The Fox*, acted under the auspices of Mr. Colman. Bensley and Parsons were by Nature fitted for Mosca and Corbaccio, and Palmer took, I thought, very kindly to Volpone. Bannister gave to Voltore more of the modern than the ancient advocate; but he excited a laugh at some well-known excesses of our bar—affectations rendering oratorical imperfection violent absurdity. Mr. Gifford, the matchless editor of Jonson, remembers the representation to which I allude, and thus expresses himself (see his 3rd vol., p. 160): 'Its last appearance, I believe, was at the Haymarket, some time before the death of the elder Colman, who made some trifling alterations in the disposition of the scenes. That it was not successful, cannot be wondered at; the age of dramatic imbecility was rapidly advancing upon us, and the stage already looked to jointed-dolls, water-spaniels, and peacock's-tails for its main credit and support.'

As far as his manly censure stigmatises the degeneracy into which personal avarice has plunged what should be the seat of taste, I copy him with a feeling of respectful acquiescence; but I cannot think the representation of *The Fox* then unsuccessful. It was acted on Friday the 12th of September, repeated on Saturday the 13th, and on the 15th the theatre closed for the season with the last new comedy. It was a profitable season on the whole. With the thermometer at 82, an additional ventilator had rendered the house as pleasant at least as any other; and for once trusting entirely to Rooker for decorations, the 'little manager' wrote nothing himself for the town but a few prologues.

Before I notice the winter theatres, I must recall to the reader's recollection the very strange and unmanly criticism which had assailed that sister of Mrs. Siddons who acted with her in *Jane Shore* and *The Mourning Bride*. The terms in which our critic expressed himself savoured of insane hatred. He challenged any one human being to pronounce her other than the most detestable of actresses. While she was in Ireland, he had not suffered her to enjoy the usual privileges of absence, but had kept up his vituperation by a pretended report of what she was doing in the sister kingdom.

I had the happiness to meet the late Mrs. Twiss at her brother's, and can therefore speak on absolute knowledge to her gentle manners and the loveliness of her person. I cannot doubt that she stepped with reluctance on board the packet that was to bring her back to the daily annoyance of her London critic. Her merits of every kind had, however, attracted the attention and secured the friendship of George Steevens, Esquire, the celebrated commentator on Shakespeare, and he inflicted upon her unmanly assailant one of the severest punishments that can be borne—the chastisement of genius. It bears his peculiar stamp on every line of it. I am sure, at that time, his heart governed his pen at least as much as his justice. The fugitive efforts of Steevens are innumerable, but they have never been collected, however easily distinguished. The manner of this address to Woodfall is so temperate, the topics so well

chosen and so feelingly touched, that I must lay it before the reader entire. It will, I hope, have an effect beyond its immediate object—future Rosciads and Clios and other masqueraders of malignity may thus be startled into reflection, and withhold the tortures of the press, which are here so keenly marked and so earnestly deprecated:

'MISS KEMBLE.

'SIR,—Among the motives that divest criticism of its rigour none has hitherto been reckoned more prevalent than our habitual tenderness to the fair sex. Even reviewers abate somewhat of their asperity when they decide on the qualifications of a female writer:—

> "Tempests themselves, high seas and howling winds,
> The gutter'd rocks and congregated sands,
> (Traitors ensteep'd to clog the guiltless keel)
> As having sense of beauty do omit
> Their mortal natures, letting go safely by
> The divine Desdemona."

'I wish, Mr. Woodfall, I could add that your theatrical agent had been influenced by similar considerations. His repeated and unaccountable severities respecting Miss Kemble have shown that he at least is unaffected by any such "compunctious visitings of nature." Throughout the course of last winter, as frequently as he found occasion to speak of this amiable girl, his remarks rather wore the aspect of personal resentment than of impartial criticism. His malignity pursued her even into Ireland. He might have allowed Mrs. Siddons her just dividend of fame without introducing comparisons between her and her sister; that is, between acting which is the result of more than ten years' practice and the less experienced efforts of a young performer. Mrs. Siddons, I am sure, would return but cold acknowledgments for praise at the expense of one whose welfare is so intimately connected with her own. Neither does confirmed excellence require the sacrifice of all subordinate pretensions. It is by no means necessary to the brightness of the moon that each inferior planet should be extinguished.

'But, perhaps, it will be said that every candidate for

public favour is liable to public animadversion. It may be added, however, that critical like legal justice should be dealt out in exact proportion to offence, and not without regard to private character, especially when the interests of a blameless female are at stake. The severity even of Roman justice allowed exclusive privileges to the vestal. But the headlong author of the playhouse articles in your paper, Sir, makes no distinction in his usage of the abandoned wanton who seeks the stage as an asylum, when her vices have disqualified her for every other way of life, and the girl of unsullied manners who becomes an actress through the hope of deriving creditable support from her profession. Surely two characters so discriminated might expect an opposite treatment. The first has, probably, lulled those sensibilities which are tremblingly awake in the second. Not driven by necessity from one trade to the exercise of another, and therefore unhardened by degrees to censure, such a one feels, severely feels, every sting of reproach, and is agonised by the paragraph or critique which a hackneyed appendage to the scenes would peruse without emotion.

'Nor does this cruel mode of passing a premature sentence on the disciples of the drama operate only against their private happiness. A degree of self-confidence is necessary toward every undertaking; but, when juvenile performers are completely humbled in their own estimation their solicitude for improvement is at an end. Let me ask our critic what his own feelings would suggest were he of this forlorn hope, and compelled to represent at night the very character in which he had been condemned without mercy in one of our morning papers. Must not then an innocent girl suffer yet more exquisitely from the same distress? Will she not think she hears the enemy's voice in every casual sound that disturbs the theatre, and find her powers irrecoverably blasted by the dread of yet more forcible disapprobation? Is there (I appeal to your own breast, Mr. Woodfall) anything so mean, so vile, as triumph over a defenceless, unoffending woman? The money, in short, received by hirelings for exposing defects in a set of people whose subsistence depends on their favour

with the public may almost be called the price of blood; for, as Shylock well expresses it—

'You take my life
When you do take the means whereby I live.'

'To the effects which newspaper acrimony, and its immediate contrast, the applause of an audience, have produced on Miss Kemble, your present correspondent, Sir, is no stranger. Her eyes have streamed over the severities of the *Public Advertiser*, and her exertions have been successful when encouraged by those who took the liberty of judging for themselves, without asking the author of "Theatrical Intelligence" whether censure or commendation was due to her performances.

'I must conclude, Mr. Woodfall, by acknowledging the general vigilance and acuteness of your theatrical Argus, though humanity obliges me to disapprove the unremitted malice with which he has persecuted a young lady whose elegance of manners, whose blameless character, and whose ambition and power to delight support her claim to all the indulgence and protection a generous and candid public can afford.—I am, Sir, your most obedient servant.

'*P.S.*—I wish, Mr. Woodfall, some of your numerous correspondents who have paid attention to playhouse matters would trace the literary persecution which has been continued with a kind of conspiracy against the performers of both theatres to its original source. About twenty years ago the demerit of an actor could be understood only by those who saw him, or heard of him in conversation. I own I cannot help being desirous that the name of the first of our stage inquisitors should be divulged, like that of the brazen bull founder, for the information of posterity, that players yet unborn may know to whom they are indebted for the cruel treatment they are almost sure to experience in the course of their best endeavours to entertain the public.'

'The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo,' and, therefore, I do not insert Mr. Woodfall's addition to this powerful appeal. But so absolutely had he

yielded to the forcible reasons of Steevens, that he expresses his own regret for the past, and as to the future he promises that the imperfections of the ladies shall be touched without any brutal violence to their sensibility.

Mrs. Siddons had succeeded in Dublin almost beyond expectation, for the Irish neither did nor could be expected to resign at once their reigning favourite, Mrs. Crawford. She is believed to have carried away £1,100 from Dublin, about £700 from Cork, and on touching her native shores £160 at Liverpool. It now, therefore, assumed the appearance of certainty that she would reach a station more honourable than had yet been accorded to theatrical talent, and that her fortune would equally surpass what had ever been acquired by acting solely in this country.

The winter managers had not been indifferent even to the male part of this lady's family, and they had each of them engaged a Mr. Kemble from the Dublin Theatre. But the usual mode by which distinction in families is preserved in real life was disdained on this occasion. The elder brother alone was Mr. Kemble—the second should have attached the elucidation afforded by his Christian name. We have heard of those anomalies called 'distinctions without a difference.' The difference as to these brothers was great indeed. The only resemblance was in the style of the features, for the countenance of Mr. Stephen Kemble was certainly handsome, though not dark, like that of his elder brother. But his figure was encumbered with flesh, there was nothing of the heroic in his proportion; but had he personated Achilles, and shouted at the door of his tent, he had equally struck a terror through the army, and probably the whole city of Troy.

He appeared on the 24th of September at Covent Garden Theatre in the character of Othello, and thus, by blackening his face, parted with his only agreeable distinction. But he had nothing of the subtle and discriminating character of his family—at least it did not enter into his acting. He was a man of sense, and even of some literary attainment; but his declamation was coarse and noisy, and his vehement passion was too ungovernable for sympathy. Othello was, in one way, a fortune to him,

for in the Desdemona of that evening, Miss Satchell, he found his real wife. Henderson's Iago was perhaps the crown of all his serious achievements—the part in which other actors were left by him in the most hopeless condition. It was all profoundly intellectual, like the character. Anything near this I have never seen. A writer of great skill, though he does not agree with those who think Iago villainous without a sufficient motive, seems to me to be much too general when he finds it only in the love of power. He has two motives of no mean rank, professional ambition and jealousy. He has seen a counter-caster, a man with nothing but the theory of the soldier, put over his head; and he suspects the gallant Moor to have injured him in his bed. He punishes preference as inexpiable guilt, and suspicion in his nature goes the full length of certainty. His invention combines all his enemies in one plan of exquisite revenge, and he cares not though it should involve the innocent with the guilty. But his motives are clearly defined in his mischiefs—he would destroy Cassio for his office, and Othello by that same jealousy which he had excited. No moral considerations thwart his designs, and among his means he has a fool for his purse-bearer. Iago has well estimated his powers of every kind, and descends from his proper sphere only for his sport or his profit. A master in all the arts of insinuation, his triumph is equally certain with the simple Roderigo, the brave, convivial Cassio, and the noble Moor, 'all-sufficient' out of the territory of the passions.

The most perplexing difficulty in the art is to turn the inside of design outward to the spectators, and yet externally seem to be cordial and sincere and interesting among the victims—it demands an instant versatility, that yet must not savour of trick. You must hear his insinuations with curses, and yet confess that you also would have been deceived. Other Iagos were to be seen through at once—their success was incredible and impossible except upon wilful blindness.

I should notice upon the present occasion the very clever performance of Roderigo by Charles Bonner, then new to the London public—nothing could possibly come nearer to

the manners of this silly gentleman. Shakespeare has afforded three striking instances of fatuity in courtship, Roderigo, Master Slender, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek; yet observe their marked distinctions, and recognise in the poet an invention that almost keeps pace with the prodigality of Nature.

The impatience of English audiences to come to the great interest has done some mischief in Othello; but enough was spared to show Roderigo stand tempering between the finger and thumb of Iago, in that exquisite scene where the master works him from the design of drowning himself to the more necessary evil of selling all his land. Eleven times does Iago recommend his pupil prey to 'put money in his purse.' With the skill to write as no other man ever thought of writing, Shakespeare, we may be sure, had actors capable of exhibiting perfectly all this mastery of art—to make it untiring to the ear, as Henderson certainly did; and yet the injunction has only these slight variations: 'Put money in thy purse.' 'Put *but* money in thy purse.' '*Fill* thy purse with money.' '*Make* all the money thou can'st.' '*Provide* thy money.' 'Put money *enough* in thy purse.'

In level earnest recitation I think Mr. Kemble surpassed all men; but in all the mellow varieties of ingenious or humorous or designing conversation, where the art is to conceal the art, and the most pungent effects are to flow in oil itself, nothing has approached Mr. Henderson; and now I fear we have less chance than ever of such perfection—the voice in large theatres is taken out of the scale for these delicate inflections of tone.

But, if the ambition of the family to occupy the highest ranks seemed a little checked by the rash enterprise of Mr. Stephen Kemble, the 30th of the same month gave to Mrs. Siddons the full triumph she had predicted in the success of her elder brother in the character of Hamlet. I have left myself little to remark in this place, having gone already very minutely and critically into that performance, and pointed out, I hope, with proper respect to other great men, the peculiar and original features of Mr. Kemble's Hamlet.[1]

[1] See *Memoirs of Mr. Kemble*, vol. i. p. 88.

I have never refused to myself in these Memoirs the pleasures of even discursive if relevant criticism; and on the present occasion I feel strongly tempted to remark upon the recent appearance of a copy of *Hamlet* previously unknown, and printed for N. L. (Nicholas Ling) and John Trundell, 1603. Among a variety of curious readings, arising from whatever cause, it has one affecting a very important point in the performance of Mr. Kemble. If the reader has honoured me by making the reference which I last pointed out, he will see on one side all previous Hamlets exclaiming to Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo, with regard to the Ghost, 'Did you not speak to it?' and he will find Mr. Kemble alone selecting his friend and schoolfellow Horatio for this interesting demand, and in a solemn and tender tone of voice thus deliberately mixing up his grief with his curiosity—

'Did YOU not *speak* to it.'

Now the copy just alluded to, if genuine Shakespeare, would put an end to this ingenious point of my late friend, however applauded by Dr. Johnson, for thus is the passage exhibited in that impression of the play—

'*Ham.* Did you not speak to it?
Hor. My lord, WE did.'

And thus, although the fuller and more correct impression of the year following (1604) made Horatio take the replication entirely to himself, 'My lord, I did,' yet Mr. Steevens would have been greatly strengthened in the objection he made to Mr. Kemble's emphasis, which rested on what he thought would be awkward construction if so spoken, namely, with the personal pronoun preceding the negative—

'Did YOU *not* speak to it?'

The very use of the term *we* by Horatio would have seemed to him to prove decisively that, though it was better for Horatio to say '*I* did' than '*we* did,' it never had entered the mind of Shakespeare to build a peculiar and endearing question to Horatio, grounded on their college

intimacy, and the suspicions that might have tinged their evening or morning conferences at Witemberg.

But had Mr. Kemble lived to enjoy this singular curiosity, he would, perhaps, triumphantly have affirmed that a copy that possessed so many passages of absolute guess at the real text, and others of premises without their conclusions, if it were allowed to confirm the usage of a word, was an unsafe guide as to meaning. He would have quoted from it—

> '*Ham.* O that this too much griev'd and sallied flesh
> Would melt to nothing, or that the universall
> Globe of heaven would turne al to a chaos.'

And further on in the play—

> '*Ghost.* O I find thee apt, and duller should'st thou be
> Then the fat weede which rootes it self in ease
> On Lethe wharffe: breife let me be.'

Where the necessity of quickly hurrying the stolen matter together has left the point antagonised out of the phrase; for the reader knows it should stand—

> 'And duller should'st thou be than the fat weed
> That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,
> Would'st thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear.'

But the furtive rogues were bold indeed when they audaciously gave us the following for the well-known address of the sovereign to Hamlet's two friends, whom he calls Rossencraft and Gilderstone—

> '*King.* Right noble friends, that our deere cousin Hamlet
> Hath lost the very heart of all his sence,
> It is most right, and we most sory for him.'

But his Majesty, however earnestly he conjures the services of these courtiers, seems to make light of them by the unfortunate employment of the difficult word 'but'—

> 'Therefore we doe desire, even as you tender
> Our care to him, and our great love to you,
> That you will labour but to wring from him
> The cause and ground of his distemperancie.
> Doe this, the King of Denmarke shal be thankfull.'

A comparison of this with original Shakespeare, from the

absence of all resemblance except in the design of the speaker, must confirm a suspicion that here our vamper of *Hamlet* used the actual words of a very miserable play upon the subject which preceded the mighty performance of Shakespeare several years; and was, Mr. Malone thinks, the work of sporting Kyd, as Ben Jonson calls him, rather perhaps from his name than his character. It would be, I confess, with some feeling of alarm that I should take up Kyd's play, were it in existence, in the fear that he might be entitled to any portion of our poet's fame, for even a first and rough sketch of the awful shade of Denmark. Yet it would be wrong to withhold from Shakespeare's predecessor, whoever he was, the credit, so justly his own, of being the most attentive observer of decorum. The closet scene of the senior play is regulated with the exactest propriety. Instead of bursting in upon the conference between the Queen and her son, held in the private chamber of her Majesty, in the frightful armour worn by him when he combated Norway, we are instructed to dress the late King more suitably for such a place—'Enter the Ghost in his night gowne.' He has also furnished his Queen with an explicit disclaimer of all participation in the murder of her first husband—

> 'But as I have a soule, I sweare by heaven,
> I never knew of this most horride murder.'

Nor should the familiar language in which it is conveyed diminish our regard for so comfortable an assurance. In the meanwhile, the controversy between the poet's commentators may remain in its full force, and her guilt or innocence be doubtful to the end of time, or end of the poet's fame, which some may consider the same date.

It was now that Mrs. Siddons paid a visit to Dr. Johnson. We have happily his own account of it in a letter to Mrs. Thrale, dated October the 27th, 1783. From the abrupt commencement, Mrs. Thrale seems to have been apprised either of the intention or the visit. 'Mrs. Siddons in her visit to me behaved with great modesty and propriety, and left nothing behind her to be censured or despised. Neither praise nor money, the two powerful

corrupters of mankind, seem to have depraved her. I shall be glad to see her again. Mrs. Siddons and I talked of plays, and she told me her intention of exhibiting this winter the characters of Constance, Katharine, and Isabella, in Shakespeare.'

When Mrs. Siddons came into the room there happened to be no chair ready for her. 'Madam,' said Johnson, with a smile, 'you who so often occasion a want of seats to other people will the more easily excuse the want of one yourself.' He inquired with which of Shakespeare's characters she was most pleased? Upon her answering that she thought the character of Queen Katharine, in *Henry the Eighth*, the most natural—'I think so too, Madam,' said he; 'and whenever you perform it, I will once more hobble out to the theatre myself.'

Little as the Doctor could either see or hear in a theatre, I regret that he did not witness the performance of Katharine by Mrs. Siddons. Johnson had told her that 'her great predecessor, Mrs. Pritchard, was in common life a vulgar idiot, who used to talk of her "gownd"; but that on the stage she seemed to be inspired by gentility and understanding.' Inspiration indeed! unless we are to suppose that in private she condescended to slip-slop, and erred, not from ignorance, but carelessness and habit. I have known great knowledge, oddly enough, tinged by early laxity of pronunciation. The reader may reflect how often, from those who must be aware of the true word, he has heard a pantomime called *pantomine*.

CHAPTER XIII

THE reader will have observed the peculiar attention paid to Mrs. Siddons last season by their Majesties, who made a point of seeing her in all the characters which she had sustained. The honour of such patronage, so marked and persevering, was reserved for our great actress exclusively. A royal command introduced her second season in the character of Isabella. The late King was an excellent judge of acting, and might be said to be well studied in the respective schools of Quin and of Garrick. He here found the dignified declamation of the old school combined with the exquisite pathos of the new. I cannot doubt, however, that it was the exact propriety of her utterance that led to the appointment of Mrs. Siddons to be reading preceptress to the Princesses.

The honours paid by all ranks to the delightful ornament of the stage kept, however, in due bounds; the enthusiasm neither became fanatical nor profane—it placed a few indifferent pictures and worse likenesses upon the walls of our dwelling-houses, was most free and bounteous in presents of various kinds; but it stopped on this side idolatry, and the drama yielded the votive palm to speculative politics.

The Republicans of the City, I remember, did not rest here as to the historian Catherine Macaulay. She could discover that 'the prelates of Charles the First paid him an impious flattery.' But I heard of no protest from the modern Clio, when her high priest, Dr. Wilson, set up her statue in the parish church of St. Stephen, Walbrook; the fierce Moloch of regicide in the very sanctuary of mercy.

'Within his sanctuary itself their shrines
Abominations—and with cursed things
His holy rites and solemn feasts profan'd,'
Paradise Lost.

But our doting Doctor did still more: he dedicated a temple to his idol, for her residence, not to her memory, and presented to her a mansion called Alfred House. (Alfred, a patriot certainly, but unluckily a king.) He furnished it with splendour, supplied a long retinue of servants, and stored the library with the literature of freedom. At Alfred House she was enthroned on her returning birthdays, and incensed by odes recited by gentlemen, and medals presented by our Doctor himself. But one little speck presented itself to the eye; the celestial Dr. Graham had restored the fair historian to health, and was, therefore, allowed to lay at her feet a copy of his modest works. He approached, it appears, on her weak side, for she finished by marrying his brother. The reverend Doctor, as is usual in these cases of literary devotion, 'breathed one sigh of ineffectual tenderness,' and set himself with reluctance entirely at liberty.

The attentions paid to Mrs. Siddons, as they were reasonable and temperate, were quite unexceptionable and more lasting.

Of her performances now, it is only necessary to repeat the order in which they succeeded each other; namely, Shore, Euphrasia, Calista, and Belvidera, and to add that her attraction did not in the least decline; and that the rival theatre, by whatever talents supported, and great indeed they were, was doomed to see a long and unbroken line of splendid carriages, in a sort of birthday procession, slowly pass the foot of Bow Street, which lent its space, too, at the close of the night to the noble vehicles of those who were at the other theatre.

In the midst of these triumphs, I will not omit to mention one opportunity afforded Miss E. Kemble of acting Rosalind, on the 16th of October. Lee Lewes wanted to play Touchstone, in humble imitation of Woodward, but the result, I believe, never transpired; and as to the lovely Rosalind, she was smothered, whatever power she possessed,

except when Kemble himself called upon her in the *Black Prince*, and the *New Way to Pay Old Debts*. Her elder sister kept her rank, but did not extend her range, by acting with Mrs. Siddons in Alicia and Almeria.

Mrs. Siddons had hitherto left Shakespeare untouched, and the first character which she acted was selected as affording some relief to her frame, really exhausted by the dreadful fatigues she had undergone, with no other intermission than was afforded by her travelling from place to place. However honourable to her, the intimacies she was compelled to cultivate with the noble, the polite, or the learned of the sister kingdoms called for no slight efforts of those spirits which, had it been practicable, should all have been reserved for the theatre. The part, therefore, thus considerately chosen was Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, which she acted for the first time in London on Monday, the 3d of November.

They who judged only by the bustle and noise, the rage or protracted sufferings of a heroine, considered Isabella to call for something less than the powers of this actress. But if measure is to be given for measure, what lower talent could possibly express this 'ensky'd and sainted virgin,' whose inborn purity creates a dignity beyond that of power, and a logic so firm and convincing that it even hides, at times, the poetical beauties of its own diction? The moral energy of Isabella is, perhaps, unequalled in the volumes of Shakespeare. Portia's solemn eulogy upon mercy is nothing to the truly dramatic charm of what follows:—

> 'O, it is excellent
> To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
> To use it like a giant.
> Could great men thunder
> As Jove himself does, Jove would ne'er be quiet;
> For every pelting, petty officer
> Would use his heaven for thunder; nothing but thunder.—
> Merciful heaven!
> Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
> Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak
> Than the soft myrtle: But man, proud man,
> Dress'd in a little brief authority,
> Most ignorant of what he 's most assur'd,
> His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
> Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
> As make the angels weep.'

The Duke in this play is a character of great moral wisdom, and Shakespeare had, from the beginning, determined to unite him suitably to Isabel. But lest so much staid gravity and wisdom should be thought too aged for such a purpose, he makes, in the very outset, Friar Thomas throw out a suspicion that his very retirement has love for its motive. This the Duke disclaims in good set terms—

> '*Duke.* No! holy father; throw away that thought:
> Believe not that the dribbling dart of love
> Can pierce a complete bosom.'

He yields at last to a wisdom and virtue fully proved, and worthy of the throne. The poet, at the close of the play, touches the subject very guardedly—

> 'Dear Isabel,
> I have a motion much imports your good;
> Whereto if you 'll a willing ear incline
> What 's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine.'

It was at one time a good deal the fashion to end all comedies with a 'Call in the fiddles,' or a 'Strike up, pipers,' —and our modern stage cooks could not permit Shakespeare to remain at the close the master of his own creatures. See how awfully it is now managed.

> 'For thee, sweet saint,—if for a brother sav'd,
> From that most holy shrine thou wert devote to,
> Thou deign to spare some portion of thy love,
> Thy duke, thy friar, tempts thee from thy vow.'

And then we have the 'spirit shining in its right orb,' blessing in course 'both prince and people,' and a royal maxim to boot—

> 'To rule ourselves, before we rule mankind:'

all which may, perhaps, come from the Muse of Charles Gildon, but really is not worth inquiry.

I take the liberty to smile at the stage discovery of the Duke in the last scene of this play, with all his regal paraphernalia, with difficulty concealed under the outstretched garments of the friar—as if it was not the man who was recognised but the clothes. At this rate, let the machinist also contrive for him a portable chair of state which may safely be hooded with the robes, and a small

globe and sceptre ready for handling upon the seat, that he may burst complete in the full blaze of sovereignty upon the scared and unsuspecting offenders.

Our most extraordinary actress performed the first scene of the second act, before Angelo, with the most perfect ease, grace, and impression, from the first rebuff to her suit—

'I had a brother then—' (which by the way is classical idiom)—

through all the arguments deduced from fitness, satire, or religious considerations. As her mind quickened in the altercation, her figure seemed to distend with the golden truths she delivered, and malignant possession appeared alone able to compel the resistance of the wretched Angelo.

Nor was she less remarkable in the scene with her brother, where she stood before him, as a searching, scrutinising spirit, to detect any quailing of feeble resolution, any even momentary preference of shameful life to lasting honour. I loved particularly the strong but tuneful accents of her satisfaction—

'There spake my brother! there my father's grave
Did utter forth a voice.'

But when the storm rose, upon his change of feeling, nothing could exceed the effect of her exclamations—

'Take my defiance! die! perish!'

After this scene the part of Isabella is no more—she has only to await her reward in the safety of her brother and the passion of the prince.

As I do not think the coincidence has been hitherto pointed out, I may remark that in the famous speculation of Claudio as to what, after its separation from the body, may become of the delighted spirit, Shakespeare's

'And blown with restless violence round about
The pendant world'

is clearly from Cicero, *in Somn. Scip.*: 'Corporibus elapsi circum terram ipsam volutantur.'

So desirous were the royal party to see anything new from Mrs. Siddons, that on the Wednesday after its first

performance *Measure for Measure* was honoured by the presence of their Majesties. If the play of Shakespeare contained much that was complimentary to the public and private virtues of the present sovereign, the other theatre, the previous night, offered the annual incense of Rowe's *Tamerlane* to the memory of William the Third.

However Rowe might misconceive, certainly misrepresent, the character of Tamerlane, Bajazet was a most outrageous caricature of Louis the XIV. Of whom it may be bare justice to assert, that he reigned in the exact spirit of his people, and his reign is not more properly his than theirs. It is a concentration of the egotism, the ambition, the taste, the refinement, the gallantry, the luxury of the French nation.

I presume tyrant Aickin did not suffer much from this temporary invasion of his brutal rights by Stephen Kemble, who was not likely to tyrannise long in Bajazet. Henderson spoke Tamerlane beautifully, Wroughton was extremely affecting in Moneses, the ladies were highly respectable, and had Bajazet appeared in his iron cage during the evening the show had been perfect. After this piece was performed a first time, as we now have it, O'Keefe's delightful entertainment of *The Poor Soldier*, which, while we are permitted the enjoyment of either the national humour or its music, cannot fail to amuse the people of the United Kingdom.

However agreeable to me the brilliant success of Mrs. Siddons and Mr. Kemble, there was one other great artist, who was making such a display of masterly talent at this time, that it would be the height of injustice not to take a more than cursory notice of his efforts. I allude to Mr. Henderson, in whom resided nearly all the critical fame of Covent Garden Theatre. The high-erected deportment, the expressive action, the solemn cadence, the stately pauses of that great original tragedian, Kemble, with the magic of countenance and form to bear up his style, have by degrees won us from the school of ease and freedom and variety and warmth, and all the mingling proprieties of humour and pathos, as Shakespeare founded it, and as it was taught by the professor whom I have just named. The styles

were certainly incompatible with each other. They were excellences to be seen apart: no man, I think, ever seriously wished for Henderson and Kemble upon the stage together. Their voices would have harmonised as little as their manners. Neither could have been expected to concede at all to the other. Henderson would never have stopped, and Kemble never gone faster. The declamation of Mr. Kemble seemed to be fetched from the schools of philosophy —it was always pure, and perfectly correct. It demanded admiration, and secured it. Though a studious man, there was no discipline apparent in the art of Henderson; he moved and looked as humour or passion required, and was not so much approved as felt. The cadence of Mr. Kemble was artificial, and formed upon the principles on which the verses he spoke were constructed. Henderson cared little about the measure of the line; he would not consider the fame of the versifier while the heart was to be struck. He 'lightened' upon the word on which the charm was deposited, and gave all the rest to hurry and neglect. What he once said to Pope showed the element of his style. It was in *Othello*, if I remember rightly—

'Haply for I 'm black!'

His friend Pope, having a remarkably fine sonorous voice, had given their full time to all the words in the line 'Haply for I am black.' Henderson, imitating the hurried suggestions of a tortured imagination, would have him instruct the audience as fast as he himself conceived, 'Haply for I 'm black.' His reading of the great scenes in this noble tragedy agonised himself and everybody fortunate enough to hear him.

This great man—dressing as carelessly as did the Quins and Cibbers, quite regardless of the costume, and the tailor, and the cephalic artist, who makes even a wig speak powerfully for an actor—now gave to the few real amateurs of the art his Hamlet, his Lear, his Richard, his Sir Giles, his Macbeth, his Iago, his Falstaff; and a great variety even after these. The reappearance of Mrs. Crawford, in Lady Randolph, on the 13th of November, afforded him an opportunity of affecting in Old Norval beyond

everything that has succeeded him. The rustic simplicity and tearful earnestness with which he uttered the following lines banished in an instant all the boards and lamps of the stage :—

> 'As I hope
> For mercy at the judgment seat of God,
> The tender lamb that never nipt the grass
> Is not more innocent than I of murder.'

But he enters upon the most interesting narrative that perhaps was ever written—the stormy night; the shrieking spirit of the angry waters; the cry of one in jeopardy; the circling eddy below the pool; the basket whirled round and round, drawn speedily to the bank; and within it, his gentle and expressive action aiding the language and almost painting the portrait—

> 'Nestled curious, there an infant lay.'

That infant the spectators knew to have been saved, they had just seen him flourishing in manly beauty; but this was no shield against the instantaneous shriek of a mother's agonising effort to know all; the sublime 'Was he alive?' of Mrs. Crawford. It checked your breathing, perhaps pulsation; it was so bold as to be even hazardous, but too piercing not to be triumphant; sympathising Nature found itself completely captive, spellbound in the circle of these mighty magicians.

As to the subject of this play, Home saw something in Lady Barnard's *Gil Morice*,[1] but more, much more, in the

[1] The locality is there—and Home had at first preserved Lady Barnard's name :

> 'But it was for a lady gay
> That liv'd on Carron side.'

We have the daring spirit of the Douglas in the noble child's message to his mother,

> 'And bid hir cum to Gill Morice,
> Spier nae bauld baron's leave.'

He perishes in consequence of the baron's jealousy, not suspecting him to be her son.

There is a singular mystery as to the production of this beautiful ballad, which, at least in print, appeared but a short time before the play of *Douglas*.

Merope of Maffei, or that of Voltaire. To use the happy figure of the French writer, 'he was in the situation of one to whom an Eastern king had made a present of the richest stuffs of the country, but the monarch would no doubt permit the foreigner to make them up in the fashion of his own.' This Home has done by retaining much of the pastoral simplicity and deadly feuds of Scotland. It is almost incredible how Aaron Hill, in his *Merope*, has perverted the beautiful expression of Voltaire. But, as the latter has taught us, 'il faut toujours beaucoup de temps aux hommes pour leur apprendre qu'en tout ce qui est grand on doit revenir au naturel et au simple.'—*Lettre à M. de Maffei.*

This was a favourite theme with antiquity, and the tender Euripides wrote a play upon it called *Cresphontes*, of which only a few fragments now exist; yet even these seem to have been remarked for their homely wisdom by the author of *Douglas*, *e.g.*—

> 'The only gains which ought to be pursu'd
> By man, are those whence no repentance springs.'

Again, and still more in his manner—

> 'Collecting all our friends, we should bewail
> The new-born child who comes into a world
> Where mischiefs swarm around him: but bear forth,
> Amidst rejoicings and auspicious songs,
> Him who is dead, and ceases from his toil.'

But enough for the present of a poet whom, as far as *Douglas* went, Mr. Hume, the historian, thought worthy to be named with Shakespeare and Otway.

Mrs. Siddons had now the prospect of acting in some few plays with her brother, Mr. Kemble, and the first effort to combine them was happily without offence to any other performer. *The Gamester* had not been acted for four years. Smith did not care for the part of Beverley; into which, therefore, Kemble slid with every propriety; and as to Brereton and Palmer, they could not be more at home than they were in Lewson and Stukely. J. Aickin acted Jarvis delightfully, and Mrs. Brereton, by anticipation, was the sister-in-law of Mrs. Siddons, by performing Charlotte to her Mrs. Beverley.

The passion of gaming, said the author of the *Night Thoughts*, needed such a caustic as the last scene of this tragedy. I know not what may in fairness be called the vices of this passion—perhaps it may easily conduct to all—but an earnest gambler could not fail to point out that Beverley is the victim rather of the rancorous hatred of a rival in love; of a schoolfellow long noted for sullen mischief, sordid and cruel, whose manhood had confirmed and extended all that was bad about him. Stukely still labours to supplant Beverley in the affections of his wife. The gambler, I believe, has but one passion.

The character now sustained by Mrs. Siddons was one of fond suffering virtue; she can really account herself rich while she fancies her husband's affection unabated. She, therefore, repels at once the suspicions with which Stukely would impress her, while disclaiming all design to alarm her. Her answer was beautifully pointed by the actress—

'*Mrs. Bev.* Nor have you, Sir. Who told you of suspicion? I have a heart it cannot reach.'

In the scene of Stukely's absurd attempt to excite jealousy about the jewels, nothing was ever better spoken than—

'Know, Sir, my injuries are my own, and do not need a champion.

But all the gradations, from strong reluctance to credit him to a compelled belief of Stukely's story about a mistress, till he unmasks, by hinting revenge to her, and proposing himself as the means, had the most surprising effect. Her eye was always full of meaning, but 'it flamed amazement' when she uttered these lines:

'Would that these eyes had heaven's own lightning, that, with a look, thus I might blast thee! O villain! villain!'

The recovered dignity, too, was very striking—

'Keep thy own secret and begone.'

But, perhaps, the finest *coup de théâtre* was the quick

contradiction of Jarvis about the quarrel with Lewson, and the eager rush up to his breast, as if she would at once banish him, along with testimony so alarming—

'No; I am sure he did not.
'Tis false, old man; they had no quarrel,—there was no cause for quarrel.'

The merits of the actress must not keep me from remarking Moore's charming observance of nature. The danger of Beverley leads to a momentary oblivion of Jarvis's important services and affectionate zeal; 'old man' is the rather disparaging term which Mrs. Beverley annexes to her contradiction.

Of equal beauty is the exquisite delicacy of this inimitable old man, as described by Charlotte; who, when he has hurried off a creditor from Beverley's door, 'begs pardon that his friend had knock'd so loud.' It is not without tears that I notice a trait so perfectly divine. When the stage teaches such conduct, it is one of the best, as it is certainly the most pleasing, of moral instructors.

Notwithstanding the elegance of Moore's genius, and the excellence of his character, he was rather unpopular; and, however ludicrous the prevention[1] of the audience or the alarm of the author, Dr. J. Spence bore for the first four nights the credit of *The Gamester*, which lost some of its admirers when it recovered its owner.

The scene of contest between Lewson and Stukely, the first of the fourth act, has been attributed to Mr. Garrick, and I should think the suggestion of it likely enough to proceed from him. It is the scene of and for an actor; one written in full parallel with that between Horatio and Lothario. As the hits in a fencing match have been applied to the witty contests in comedy, I may call these a resemblance to the scene between Hamlet and Laertes, where the points of the weapons are

'Unbated and envenomed.'

Aware, as I am, that *The Gamester* was written partly in blank verse, I confess the scene here alluded to does not

[1] I thus use the word on the authority of Dryden, with the sanction of Dr. Johnson.

A fashionable writer of the day, the same who had so cruelly persecuted her sister, Mrs. Twiss, ventured almost to restrict her merit to the speaking of a single word in the line—

'For grief is proud, and makes his owner stout;'

which the reader may remember is one, but the very weakest perhaps, of a speech which she delivered with an energy of sorrow so mighty as, seated but on the bare earth, rendered the splendid chair of state less venerable and majestic.

'I will instruct my sorrows to be proud;
For grief is proud, and makes his owner stout.
To me, and to the state of my great grief,
Let kings assemble; for my grief's so great
That no supporter but the huge firm earth
Can hold it up: here I and sorrow sit;
Here is my throne, bid kings come bow to it.'
(*Throws herself on the ground.*)

Sure I am she had uttered nothing up to that time that possessed a tithe of the power by which these wonderful lines are sustained.

Upon the coming in of all those royal recreants by whom her cause had been abandoned, and the distinct announcement of the marriage with Blanch, what could equal her impression while exclaiming as she rises—

'A wicked day, and not a holy day!'

again:

'A widow cries; be husband to me, heavens!'

one of the very boldest flights of him who 'flew at infinite.' After the furious demand of 'war—no peace,' and the withering contempt that clogged the very name of Lymoges, who can remember her look, her action, and her tone, and not be sure that, in real life, such a Constance prepared the victim for the future sword of Faulconbridge?

'He liv'd a coward in his own esteem.'

The only other scene, the fourth of the third act, is too well known to the readers of Shakespeare to make it necessary that I should quote from it. Constance is too impassioned for hope; she sees the future in the instant: Arthur in the power of her enemy is already dead to her; and it is

in another world that, worn down with early sorrow, she fears she shall not know him. Her prophetic soul has disposed of him in this. She therefore does not linger in expectation, but expires of frenzy before his own rashness rather than his uncle's violence has ended her pretty Arthur. In the exit of Constance the sharp shrillness of the organ itself will do something for an actress not highly intellectual; however vehement in her exclamations, Constance has meaning in her language; this was truly given by Mrs. Siddons, and not an inarticulate yell, the grief of merely savage nature.

I preserve the dresses of Mrs. Siddons where I find a note of them in my papers: in Constance she wore a black body and train of satin, and a petticoat of white, disposed in certainly the most tasteful forms of that day. The true actress is in everything an artist; the genius before us dishevelled even her hair with graceful wildness.

By whatever power of writing adorned—the frank bravery of Faulconbridge, the quick succession of opposite tidings, and the fate of John—it was dangerous to show such a meteor as Constance, and linger two acts further after she has disappeared. Such is the inconvenience of chronicle plays; passion demands one termination and history another: you call on individual interest as your aid and are ruined by your auxiliary. It is the *Æneid* after the fate of Dido.

That the theatre should teach history is little extraordinary. A most ingenious writer, William Godwin, was now publishing sketches of history in six *sermons*!

But, whatever might be the motive for acting John at the theatre, it was not then so popular as it was expected to be. Two scenes of Siddons, however exquisite, were not enough for those who had been accustomed to see her occupy every act of plays more essentially female. Kemble, too, was much nearer excellence than he was to his subsequent steady attraction. At the other house, Henderson was acting Macbeth to vacancy, with the Lady Macbeth of Mrs. Bates, and Mrs. Yates and Miss Younge both in the theatre, and Mrs. Crawford only absent upon leave. The Trunk-maker, however, assured that fine actor that in 1759 and 1760 he had sitten quite cool at the Macbeths of Garrick

and Pritchard! 'I beg cold comfort,' as King John exclaims.

In a former page, with the proper freedom of a critic, I have pointed out the charm of the great scene in *Douglas*, as it was acted by Henderson and Mrs. Crawford. Perhaps the most serious moment of the professional life of Mrs. Siddons was that in which she resolved to contest even Lady Randolph with her rival. She wisely made her impression on the night of her benefit—it secured the greatest measure of encouragement, if any apprehension at all existed. She had many advantages in the competition—youth, beauty, a finer figure, more power of eye, a voice in its whole compass sound and unbreaking. Her declamation, too, was more studied, finished, and accurate. She was sure to give a better reading of the part; the only question was, what was to balance the storm of passion by which her great rival had surprised and subdued a long succession of audiences?

I cannot but think it a peculiar happiness to Mrs. Siddons that she seems through life so little to have imitated what other performers did in the parts she acted. I willingly believe this not to have been sufficiency, as despising others, or disdaining help; but from a settled conviction that she could only be great by being truly original, and that she ought to deliver her own conceptions of character with absolute indifference by what other artists they were either disputed or confirmed. How the fact may stand is of little moment, but I think if her first audience to Lady Randolph had been asked for an opinion upon the point, the answer would have been uniform, that no one could suppose that she had ever seen Mrs. Crawford in the character.

Before we examine her own performance, it may be proper to inquire what support she received from the other actors on the scene with her; and, first, the disparity was immense between Bensley, the Old Shepherd of Drury, and Henderson, the Norval of Covent Garden. Bensley looked one part of the character truly—

'For he had been a soldier in his youth.'

But pathos rendered his voice ragged as well as repulsive,

and he never, as to his feet, either stood or walked with the character of age. His helpless action had a character of restrained vigour; he implored pity in the noisy shout of defiance. His understanding, however, was of a superior kind, and it rendered him always respectable, and sometimes nearly excellent.

Brereton in Douglas was a tragic actor, which Lewis could never be but by the greatest courtesy. I could have wished the son less confirmed in manhood, less bulky, I mean, in reference to the person of Mrs. Siddons—but Palmer, in Glenalvon, was gigantic, and happily towered far above him. Then he had the 'ravishing stride' of Tarquin himself, and was quite tragedian enough for this miserable shred out of the skirts of Shakespeare's Iago. Farren at the one house, and Wroughton at the other, were equally at home in the 'bauld baron,' Lord Randolph. The Anna, by Miss Wheeler, was rather undercast. She is more than the faithful attendant upon Lady Randolph; she is neighbour to the dearest secrets of her bosom. Miss Kemble would have here been exactly the point desired—looking intelligence, her sympathy would have strongly aided the passion of the scene, and the congenial nature would have justified so important a confidence. I measure these things by no prompter or treasurer's standard—the salary goes with me, and should go, for nothing; it is the demand of the part that is to be considered, the combining interests of the drama.

How is the moppet of some loose man of fashion, whose little power is smothered in the waste fertility of her personal attractions, and who therefore is all prettiness, and affectation, and constraint,—how is such a one to catch the key-note and continue the harmonious elocution of a great actress; still farther, as Shakespeare strongly expresses it, how is she to—

> 'Tend her in the eyes, and make her bends adornings?'

But the great La Clairon shall herself teach us the importance of a confidante. 'I remember' (she writes) 'being exceedingly unwell at a time when I had to act Ariane (Ariadne), and fearing that I should not be able to go

through the fatigue of the character, I had caused an easy chair to be placed upon the stage, to sustain me in case I should require it. In fact, during the fifth act, while expressing my despair at the flight of Phedra and Theseus, my strength did fail me, and I sunk almost senseless into the chair. The intelligence of Mademoiselle Brilland, who played my confidante, suggested to her the occupation of the scene at this moment by the most interesting attentions about me. She threw herself at my feet, took one of my hands, and bathed it with her tears. In the speech she had to deliver, her words were slowly articulated, and interrupted by her sobs. She thus gave me time to recover myself. Her look, her action, affected me deeply; I threw myself into her arms, and the public, in tears, acknowledged this intelligence by the loudest applause.' After this tribute of the Siddons of the French stage to Mademoiselle Brilland, nothing is wanting but the actual speech, broken so judiciously by her sobs, and graced by her expressive attentions, and that is with great certainty supplied by the page of Corneille. Thus it stands :—

NERINE

'Calmez-cette douleur ;—où vous emporte—t-elle ?—
Madame,—songez—vous—que tous—ces vains projets—
Par l'éclat—de vos cris—s'entendent—au palais ?'

The French critic cannot fail to see how admirably the address of the actress is seconded by the language of Corneille; and I am not at all sure that this accidental heightening of the scene should not pass into a custom, and the invention of Mademoiselle Brilland brille à jamais dans la tragédie d'Ariane!

I have many reasons for wishing to press this event upon the English actress. It is true, in general, that little attention is paid to the inferior characters, and such intelligence might often be thrown away upon our noisy audiences; but, if the effort strike one true admirer of the stage, it will not be lost, nor will the imitator of Mademoiselle Brilland remain long in obscurity. The quickness and adroitness of the French confidante I do not quite expect, however, from my fair countrywomen.

In considering the performance of Lady Randolph by Mrs. Siddons, the attention will seize upon the capital point of distinction between her and Mrs. Crawford. It has been said that the execution of her 'Was he alive?' was so piercing that it was triumphant—but was it just under the circumstances?—they must be accurately stated. Assassins hired by Glenalvon assail the life of Lord Randolph—he is preserved by young Norval. A pursuit, directed after these ruffians, brings to the castle a stranger who was found lurking in the wood, and who, on being searched, is discovered to have upon his person very costly jewels, surmounted with the crest of Douglas. Of these circumstances Lady Randolph is accurately informed by her faithful Anna, who herself discerned the cognizance so important to her noble mistress. They enter together to the examination of the wretch in custody; and observe what passes between them, and the conviction of Lady Randolph that her son certainly perished, or the jewels could never have been in possession of any stranger. Observe, too, the necessity of avoiding any disclosure from acute feeling.

'*Anna.* Summon your utmost fortitude, before
You speak with him. Your dignity, your fame,
Are now at stake. Think of the fatal secret,
Which in a moment from your lips may fly.
L. Rand. Thou shalt behold me, with a desperate heart,
Hear how my infant perish'd.'

Here are two points given of much weight in our decision: caution as to disclosure, and conviction as to the child's death, whatever the stranger has to tell. His narrative is in every memory, I had almost said in every heart. The infant is described as found nestled curiously in a basket, which the eddy of the boiling torrent has thrown up. The question, 'Was he alive?' is not, therefore, to be uttered as if the answer in the affirmative gave any hope of his present existence—nor does the answer, 'He was,' at all change the tendency of Lady Randolph to believe him destroyed. A breast agitated so as to shriek out Mrs. Crawford's question ought to have been lulled by the answer she received. But is this the case with Lady

Randolph? By no means; the answer yields no relief: persisting in her notion of his fate, she now, incensed as well as afflicted, exclaims—

'Inhuman that thou art!
How could'st thou kill what waves and tempests spar'd?'

I am certain that Mrs. Siddons thus reasoned the passage, and that it was the conviction of her mind such an explosion was unsuitable that led her into a manner less alarming but more natural. It was, therefore, neither ambition of difference, evasion of difficulty, or fear of competition that produced her hurried, breathless mode of putting that question, on whose effect the Lady Randolph of her rival principally rested.

Often have I examined, by the only steady lights—the page of the author and that of human nature—these *tours de force* on the French stage, as well as our own; and very rarely indeed is there one of which an accurate reading does not dispel the charm. In a crowded theatre, with beauty before you, and the most affecting thing in the world, a woman's voice thrilling to your soul, the nerve is gained, and the judgment dethroned. When the Dumesnils and Crawfords were, therefore, said to know 'the readiest way to the heart,' it may always be proper to inquire whether they did not surprise that fortress into a surrender whose garrison they had 'frighted with false fire.' However delightful the charming agonies may be, inflicted by these enchantresses, we should yield only to true emotion; and even in ecstasy itself be found *cum ratione insanire.*

Having thus, perhaps, disposed of the great point of comparison, I believe the effects of the minor passages were uniformly on the side of Mrs. Siddons—her narrative had more interest, her attention more intelligence, her ascendency more awe. In the scene with Glenalvon, villainy sunk under her glance, and her action added definition to a general term. 'Thou art known to me,' was the most expressive of dignified but contemptuous menaces.

The narrative to Anna in the opening of the play evinced the soundness of her taste. The poet never failed her, and she in perception was another self. She knew the magnifying power of a diminutive as the representative of hasty

joy, and used it exquisitely in the description of her union with Douglas.

'Three weeks, three little weeks, with wings of down'—

One of the lines of this narrative has done the most delicate service in nature ever since the play was written—

'I found myself—
As women wish to be, who love their lords.'

But we can hardly, current as it is, expect to hear it again so spoken, as it mournfully lingered from the half-alarmed modesty of this finished orator.

If Doctor Johnson had intended to do justice to any writer of the North, he might have commended Home for the beautiful image which follows, so very Shakespearean, and yet not his—

'Can thy feeble pity
Roll back the flood of never-ebbing time?'

He has in *Othello* what might have suggested it—'his Pontick sea'

'Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on.'

But genius only can thus employ the materials of genius. Any inspiring subject found in Home deep pathos and the true poetic style; but his mind was not fertile in combinations, and he seems not to have mastered any great variety of characters. I read *Agis* and the *Siege of Aquileia* languidly, in spite of prepossession; and wished, for the fame of the modern stage, that their author had written only *Douglas*.

A few points of that *chef-d'œuvre* still await us which derived an accession to their beauties from the inimitable actress. The comparison of the fancied happy mother of Norval with herself—the discrimination between two persons whom the audience so keenly anticipated to be one—

'She for a living husband bore her pains,
And heard him bless her when a man was born:'

a feminine feeling beautifully announced by the poet—

'Whilst I—to a dead husband bore a son,
And to the roaring waters gave my child.'

She was sweetly interesting, too, while comparing her boy with blooming Norval—

> 'Whilst thus I mus'd, a spark from fancy fell
> On my sad heart,' etc.

This spark from fancy (how could it fail?) kindled a flame in every maternal bosom around her. Her eye was so humid and lustrous, and her brow looked the chosen seat of fancy. She then determines to be the 'artist of young Norval's fortune.' I wish she had dared to break through the cross-bars upon the prompter's copy, and allow Lady Randolph to utter the following beautiful simile as it came from the imagination of Home:—

> 'Tis pleasing to admire!—most apt was I
> To this affection in my better days!—
> Though now I seem to you shrunk up, retir'd
> Within the narrow compass of my woe.
> Have you not sometimes seen an early flower
> Open its bud, and spread its silken leaves,
> To catch sweet airs and odours to bestow;[1]
> Then, by the keen blast nipt, pull in its leaves,
> And, though still living, die to scent and beauty?
> Emblem of me; affliction, like a storm,
> Hath kill'd the forward blossom of my heart.'

It was reserved for Home to vary at least the application of the famous 'Ut flos in septis' of Catullus, in the *Carmen Nuptiale*—

> 'Quem mulcent auræ, firmat sol, educat imber.'

Through all the Italian and Spanish and French poets, down to the homely version of Gay in *The Beggar's Opera*, the subject compared has been the virgin preserving or losing her purity. But there is nothing, even in the poet of Verona himself, equal to this line of Home's—

> 'And, though still living, die to scent and beauty.'

There is, in the fourth act of this play, some little inconsistency. Lady Randolph had written by old Norval, to the youth, her son, to meet her at midnight in privacy, to explain to him circumstances of such moment as not to be trusted to the very air of Lord Randolph's residence.

[1] Stealing and giving odour.—*Shakespeare.*

By accident Lord Randolph and his kinsman Glenalvon are summoned to meet the valiant John of Lorn, and his Lady and Norval are left together. She addresses him thus—

> 'This way with me. Under yon spreading beech,
> Unseen, unheard, by human eye or ear,
> I will amaze thee with a wondrous tale.'

There is no indication of the scene changing; yon beech must be at some distance—a more 'removed ground,' suited to the disclosure; yet here, without retiring, she shows him the jewels—tells him who was his father; and throwing herself upon his neck, acknowledges that she is his mother. The wondrous tale is already told; nothing remains but the recovery of his lands. For the stage arrangement no more would be necessary than thus to change the first line—

> 'While Randolph entertains his gallant friend,—
> Unseen, unheard,' etc.

In the fifth act the meeting in the wood takes place, and at the midnight hour, as previously arranged. With respect to Mrs. Siddons, in this act, there was no question about her superiority, and her passions were displayed in the tones of harmony. Her great rival seemed to me the first of a school, in later periods much admired, which deemed discordance the natural ally of anguish, and tortured the ear to overpower the heart—forgetful of the great master's precept—

> 'In the very torrent, tempest, and whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.'

Mrs. Siddons, a little deferring to costume, relieved the sable body and train of Lady Randolph by a great deal of white covering upon the bosom, which took with graceful propriety the form of the ruff. And this was much, in those easy times, when nobody thought of risking the laughable in the correct.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER all petty cavils and prejudices long radicated, the character of Lady Randolph may be considered as sealing the reputation of Mrs. Siddons. The natural tendency of popularity so vast and lasting might be conceived to beget a confidence which no previous instance had sanctioned; and notwithstanding the serious disclaimer of all pride, published in the early effusion of her gratitude,[1] some caution seemed to be necessary, lest she should imagine herself to hold by a tenure not extended to such giddy habitations as the hearts of the multitude.

A very intelligent contemporary, a member, too, of the profession, and a man of letters, thus, perhaps, more than cautions the delightful novelty. 'Mrs. Siddons has in Belvidera, as well as many other parts, not only attracted the attention, but absolutely fixed the favour of the town in her behalf. This actress, like a resistless torrent, has borne down all before her. Her merit, which is certainly very extensive in tragic characters, seems to have swallowed up all remembrance of present and past performers; but as

[1] 'She knows the danger arising from extraordinary and unmerited favours, and will carefully guard against any approach of pride, too often their attendant. Happy shall she esteem herself if, by the utmost assiduity, and constant exertion of her poor abilities, she shall be able to lessen, though hopeless ever to discharge, the vast debt she owes the public.'—D. L. T., *Dec.* 17*th*, 1782.

Johnson would have said—perhaps, did say—'She has raised herself and her family from the honours of Wolverhampton to those which a theatre royal can confer; she has established her sway over the passions of all, from the sovereign to the mechanic; she sees respect and affluence the produce of her genius, and has a right to be proud.'

I would not sacrifice the living to the dead, neither would I break down the statues of the honourable deceased to place their successors on their pedestals. The fervour of the public is laudable; I wish it may be lasting; but I hope without that ingratitude to their old servants which will make their passion for Mrs. Siddons less valuable, as it will convey a warning to her that a new face may possibly erase the impression which she has so anxiously studied to form, and so happily made.'

Thus did Davies temperately express himself at the very period of time which I am now passing over. He adds, what I can seriously confirm, that the comedians complained that their farces did not tell after the tragedy of Mrs. Siddons; but he forgot to add when such a complaint was ever made before. But whether Davies, from generosity or policy, hinted at equality, and presumed decline of favour, the consideration was likely enough in prudent minds to beget great care and economy; and purchases in the Funds were announced as disposing of the large sums gained by her benefits. Here at least some gleam of comfort broke upon the discontented; where there was the most incessant labour there was probably avidity of gain, possibly avarice. It cost little to make the assertion, and she now began to be assailed for penurious habits, hardness of heart, and a remarkable want of charity.

> 'For if a cherub in the shape of woman
> Should walk this world, yet Defamation would,
> Like a vile cur, bark at the angel's train.'

Among the lighter ornaments of detraction, one epigram, I remember, accused her 'of lingering behind the rest of the congregation in the gallery of Saint Martin's to avoid a present of benevolence to the Westminster Dispensary.' With all the eagerness of general charity upon such occasions, I do not believe, even in the gallery of Saint Martin's, that there could be found so little curiosity as to leave Mrs. Siddons behind in this race for the churchwarden's plate.

Another and a subtler foe involves her with Mrs. Crawford, Miss Younge, and the other imperial queens of

the stage (Mrs. Abington and one or two more excepted) in a censure drawn down by the most extreme hardness of heart, parsimoniousness, haughtiness, and inattention to the voice of affliction even among the fallen empresses of their own profession. This now was really judicious, for the whole weight of it would fall on the lady of the party about whom the public mind was then occupied. The same article took care to assert the superior merits of Mrs. Crawford on the stage, and represented the fame of Mrs. Siddons as borne up only by the vapour of fashionable folly.[1] The merits of the actress have borne her triumphant through all changes of the moment, though her great admirers have, to be sure, occasionally disgraced themselves.

Such were the commencements of that malevolence which will be shown hereafter to excite clamour against her, even in the seat of her empire—the theatre itself. Miserable as these arts are, they claim a record; that it may be seen how keenly envy follows great success, and that in the profession which gratifies self-love more quickly and forcibly than any other all the gales are not halcyon: some, like a sudden frost, check all self-complacency, and others blight for a time our goodwill to society and reliance upon its justice.

The list of first-rate female characters in tragedy is not very extensive. I mean such as are strongly discriminated by manners. The complaint of Aristotle is likely to apply to the modern periods of every drama. Character will not be so pronounced as that you should be able always to anticipate the decision of the speaker.[2] On the 6th of March 1784, Mrs. Siddons acted, for the first time, Hall Hartson's *Countess of Salisbury*. Of this poet, educated by the

[1] It will scarcely be believed that a contemporary thus abused her: 'The judicious would as soon see Bensley murdering Lear, or kicking up the heels of Alexander the Great. Her head seems to dance upon wires, like that of Punch's antic queen; though a Gentoo might think it more resembled that of the china mandarin in our drawing-rooms.' Yet even this wretch admired her beauty.

[2] Dacier at least so understands the great master; and he thus whimsically illustrates him from Virgil: 'Si Virgile ne nous avait fait prévoir aucune résolution d'Enée, et que nous fussions incertains s'il obéira aux

excellent Dr. Leland, the originality has been questioned, on account of the following very beautiful effusion, spoken by Mrs. Siddons :—

> 'Never, oh, never more shall Ela run,
> With throbbing bosom, at the trumpet's sound,
> To unlock his helmet conquest-plum'd, to strip
> The cuisses from his manly thigh, or snatch
> Quick from his breast the plated armour, wont
> To oppose my fond embrace. Sweet times, farewell!
> These tender offices return no more.'

A friend, it seems, complimented the author upon his very ingenious use of Homer in the preceding passage. Mr. Hartson disclaimed, as he well might, any knowledge of the obligation; and, like a true friend, the reminder went his way and asserted that, not knowing what it contained, Mr. Hartson could not be the author of his own play. The play, observe, was taken by the pupil from Dr. Leland's romance of *Longswood, Earl of Salisbury*—the doctor was in all certainty as well acquainted with Homer as with Demosthenes. But what obligation in fact has Homer conferred upon either master or scholar?—literally in English this—

> 'From whom Andromache shall ne'er receive
> Those glorious arms, for thou shalt ne'er return.'[1]

Nor is Andromache even the speaker; what is said comes from Jove himself. The passage, in original Homer, begins at verse 201 of the 17th Book.

The reader sees that Hartson has given and well-given the manner of chivalry. His picture is the unarming the accomplished knight by the soft fingers of his lady on his return from battle and victory; and it is minute enough to have gratified Don Quixote himself.

dieux, ou s'il leur preferera Didon, en ce cas il n'y aurait point de mœurs, quelque diligence qu'Enée fit pour hâter sa fuite.'

If Virgil had not led us to foresee any resolution of Eneas's, but we were doubtful whether he would obey the gods, or prefer Dido; in that case, there would be no manners, whatever speed he might make to run away from her.

If passages acquire even a joke in translation it is something.

[1] *ὅ τοι οὔ τι μάχης ἐκνοστήσαντι*
Δέξεται Ἀνδρομάχη κλυτὰ τεύχεα Πηλεΐωνος.
Iliad, Β. 17, v. 207.

The great actress carried the Countess through three representations, and on the 24th of April acted Sigismunda, in the tragedy of *Tancred and Sigismunda*, being the night of her second annual benefit. This play was first performed on the 18th March 1745. Patriotism in those days was at least as friendly to an author as poetry. The author of *Liberty* dedicated his play to Frederick, Prince of Wales, and Pitt and Lord Lyttelton interested themselves so successfully with Garrick that Thomson had his best services in Tancred. The two statesmen attended the rehearsals, to the benefit, it is said, of the piece—the actors availing themselves of the instructions of men so highly admired. When it is considered that the performers were Garrick, Sheridan, Delane, and Mrs. Cibber—but we know the attention to rank in the playhouse.

Mrs. Cibber is said to have been extremely like Mr. Garrick, below the middle stature like him, and possessing features which exhibited the true alphabet of passion. Davies says they might have been thought brother and sister—a sort of advantage which Kemble and Siddons fully enjoyed, with the greatest elegance of figure.

Sigismunda opens the play, and rather awkwardly. The King touches, it seems, his last moments, and Tancred is gone out hunting. She, therefore, till he shall return, very quietly details to Laura all that seems to her mysterious about his birth; her father, she adds, reared him in Belmont's woods, with 'princely accost, nay with respect,' language not very intelligible: but after relating her no knowledge to Laura, she suddenly recollects that the young lady probably knows much more of him than she does, and we have an *à propos* rather comic:

> 'Laura, perhaps your brother knows him better.
> What says Rodolpho? does he truly credit
> The story of his birth.'
> *Laura.* He has sometimes,
> Like you, his doubts.'

This friendly young lady, however, opening the praises of Tancred, Sigismunda seizes the theme, and copiously pursues a subject so inexhaustible, when her father suddenly enters. He orders her to retire; but Sigismunda venturing

an inquiry as to the King, he tells her of his death, and calmly relates the manner of it. After a second command, she leaves him to his interview with Tancred, now returned from the chase. Sigismunda here is nothing. There is but little for her either in the scene with Tancred ; a rising alarm that his greatness may disturb their union, some commonplaces as to the sacrifices of monarchs to the public welfare, and the first act leaves her without a point.

In the whole second act Sigismunda only once appears, and that is oppressed with grief and passing silently through the back scene.

The third act is opened by Sigismunda sitting in melancholy rumination ; and here Mrs. Siddons found something to work upon; though I must think the language remarkably cold and weak. The contrasted conduct of Tancred, however well pruned (for Thomson is redundant and heavy), produced some effect. The entrance of Siffredi to his daughter brought out the great actress :—

> 'Hopes I have none !—those by this fatal day
> Are blasted all.'

Where she determines upon her future conduct as to Tancred the delicacy of her question was very finely given :—

> 'What would you more, my father?'

When the wily statesman has disclosed that 'more' in the proposed union with Osmond—all the little endearing supplications, the references to her mother, which Nature taught Otway, and Thomson echoed pretty exactly—produced delightful effect from the long sterility that preceded. Laura comes into the design of the father, inveighs against Tancred, and aids her to make herself a wretch.

On the presentation of Osmond by her father the utmost skill faltered out :—

> 'I am a daughter, sir—and have no power
> Over my own heart. I die. Support me, Laura.'

The fourth act is really beautiful. The explanation of her lover, the suspicion as to her father, the determination to preserve principle in whatever misery, the terrible

interview with Tancred, the entrance of Osmond and the result—all required only the 'words that burn' to be of the very highest power; but the actress supplied all by the eloquence of eye and gesture.

Of the fifth act the interest is in the surprise of the King by Osmond in the chamber of his wife. An author, after a death-wound, may keep a heroine alive as long as his interest requires; but extreme length of conversation is, I believe, precluded by nature, and four long speeches no art ought to insist upon making after the powerful hand of death is felt in the blow.

Mrs. Siddons, however, rendered the death of Sigismunda tenderly perfect; and we should have admitted her right to appear after it, like Mrs. Cibber, in the character of the Tragic Muse. Perhaps the circumstance preserved in the original epilogue might lead to the noble picture of her by Sir Joshua Reynolds, painted certainly in the present year [1784].

Whether the suggestion came from the mind of Thomson, or one quite its equal, the President's own, I must leave unsettled; but the Muse of Tragedy led him to Michael Angelo, whose inspiration had executed the Sybils and Prophets in the Vatican; and he seized as a model for his design the Prophet Joel, with his two attendant figures behind the chair.

Joel is supposed to have been a contemporary of Hosea, and to have lived about eight hundred years before Christ. Michael Angelo, perhaps on no authority, has represented him as advanced in life, the hair already gone from the top of the head, but what remains of great strength and character: he slightly inclines over a scroll, which is of great width, in the form of Greek manuscripts. The greater mass is in the right hand, and the left sustains the portion which he is reading. The right foot is bare and advanced, the left retires within the folds of the garment; and an ample cloak, which covers the shoulders, falls in massy and majestic folds across the knees of the figure, which are so sundered as to allow the weight to assume the lines of grandeur. The Book of Joel is but three chapters, and treats but of three subjects—the Babylonian captivity, the

descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, and the Last Judgment, which, it should be observed, is the subject of the grand ceiling of the Pope's chapel, of which the Prophets are angular decorations. Such the great portions of the mighty whole.

Sir Joshua had here a difficulty; he had to combine portrait with mythology, the woman with the Muse. Had he intended the latter merely, the substances of the dress would have been more solid, and contained fewer small parts; as he blended the characters the materials are of modern usage, and the forms alone exceed the dignity of the actress's toilet. The style of decoration chosen for the head and shoulders seems to have been, from a variety of portraits, his own decided taste, and suited to the peculiarities of his system of colour. The figure retires a little to the left side, the right arm depending over one arm of the massy chair, the left, raised on its elbow, resting upon the other. The kind of expression given to the face, which is very beautiful, seems an abstraction of Tragedy; contemplating its essence rather than its forms, its effects rather than its properties. Its ministers attend behind in the Aristotelian shapes of Terror and Pity; the first advances trembling with the bowl of aconite, the second droops over the reverted dagger. The turbid atmosphere, while it sustains, accords with the figures, to which it adds its elemental strife, only less dreadful than the war of the passions.

When, in the year 1774, Sir Joshua pronounced his 'Sixth Discourse,' which treats of the use of the inventions of others; when he showed that conceit or indifference avoiding such resources would soon, from mere barrenness, be reduced to the poorest of all imitations, he was little aware that in ten years from that date he might have extended his arm to the magnificent portrait I have been describing, and, as his modesty would have chosen to put it, exclaimed, 'See, gentlemen, behold my obligations to Michael Angelo.' The original picture is now in the collection of Lord Grosvenor, and, by his lordship's most liberal politeness, accessible in the summer to all who wish to enjoy his collection; and you are not permitted to gratify his servants for the respectful attention which they are seem-

ingly happy to show the visitors honoured with his lordship's card.

Mr. Desenfans had a duplicate of the picture, now in Dulwich College. As I once had frequent opportunities of inspecting the latter picture, I may as well record that it seemed to me inferior to the original in force, which will certainly surprise no artist. Sir Joshua inscribed his name and the date, 1784, on the hem of the garment, as borne to posterity by Mrs. Siddons. I am happy to say that the union thus given is never likely to be sundered, for, though the picture must one day perish, the engraving of Haward can be renewed for ever. The expressive language of Mr. Burke is alone adequate to the fame of such an artist, and I select this picture to justify his praise. 'He was the first Englishman who added the praise of the elegant arts to the other glories of his country. In taste, in grace, in facility, in happy invention, and in the richness and harmony of colouring, he was equal to the great masters of the renowned ages. In portrait he went beyond them, for he communicated to that description of the art in which English artists are the most engaged a variety, a fancy, and a dignity derived from the higher branches. His portraits remind the spectator of the invention of history and the amenity of landscape. In painting portraits he appeared not to be raised upon that platform, but to descend to it from a higher sphere.'

Mr. Burke inspected the progress of this picture with his characteristic ardour, and, with a *sic itur ad astra*, pronounced it to be the noblest portrait he had ever seen of any age. If the great actress, when it unfolded the full magic of its perfection before her, could repress all feeling like pride, she was a model of humility, as well as grandeur, which the world has seldom seen.

The second season of Mrs. Siddons closed on the 13th of May with a sixth performance of Belvidera. She acted fifty-three times between the 8th of October and her last night, that is, allowing for the oratorios in Lent, nearly once in every three nights of the company's performance. The thermometer of attraction thus arranges the various characters she acted. Isabella, seven times; Mrs. Beverley,

seven also; Belvidera and Lady Randolph alike, six repetitions; Shakespeare's Isabella and Thomson's Sigismunda, five each; Euphrasia and Constance, four; Shore and the Countess of Salisbury, three; Zara, in *The Mourning Bride*, two; Calista, one.

It could not be expected that an equal sum should be drawn from the public, yet the popularity of the actress continued the same through both seasons. Nor do I think, in a pecuniary point of view, that the combining her brother's excellences in the same plays added to the receipts. Compared with her, there were many who considered him cold and artificial. During the summer recess the war of paragraph continued in town, and means of annoyance very unexpectedly arose from a member of her own family. Miss Kemble had been retained, by the influence of her sister, in a situation of great respectability in the theatre, and I have shown one effort of her powerful advocate to correct the malignant severity of public criticism. But this was not all. Mr. Steevens, whatever were his views, took great pleasure in expatiating upon this lady's acquirements, and asserted in his tour of diurnal influence (and he had a tongue to persuade) that diffidence alone prevented her from dividing the crown of tragedy, though in what proportions he was perhaps too prudent to state. It is fair to suppose that, with the friendly access he possessed, he did not refrain from making the young lady's own ear acquainted with the important discovery that her mind was 'every way stronger and more cultivated than her sister's.'[1]

Perhaps some of this trash as to the comparative strength of mind of these sisters had no basis but the supposition that the attentions of old Mr. Sheridan were preceptive, and that the actual strength of mind evinced professionally by Mrs. Siddons seemed striking enough to imply a judgment superior to her own. But Mr. Sheridan has passed away and all his lectures of elocution. She had attended to no preceptor when Henderson pronounced her the first of actresses. She differed essentially, radically, from her brother, Mr. Kemble, through life; and if ever the efforts

[1] See his letter, dated 27th of July 1784, in Mr. Hayley's posthumous *Memoirs* of his own life.

of mortal wore a uniform character, from the commencement of its career to the close of it, Mrs. Siddons may truly be said

'To be herself alone.'

She knew better than any one how to individuate character; she was engrossed by it completely; her very form, expression, gesture, voice itself seemed to be bounded by her strong conception of the part she acted. She had more attention than I ever saw to what was doing and to be done. She seemed never to be thinking of an audience, and they gratefully repaid her by thinking, where she was, of nothing but herself. Who has ever yet taught to add intensity to emotion, and to communicate new dignity to the sublimity of poetic expression? Nor is this the strain of required panegyric, the grace which an author may think it discreet to bestow upon the subject on which he works. Were Mrs. Siddons my enemy I should speak thus of her as an actress, though I might naturally regret that the incense cast upon her altar procured only aversion to her admirer.

The prudence which was so strong a feature in the character of Mr. Siddons had been convinced of the permanence of his wife's attraction, and they, consequently, had taken a house in Gower Street; and she returned the visits of her fashionable friends in a carriage of her own. There was no ostentation about it. She sometimes came to the theatre to see others act, and always paid the greatest attention to the performance; but she did not, like some others, sit remarkably forward, and throw her whole person, I was going to say, into the lap of the audience, under the pretext of applauding strongly those whom she admired. She never applauded at all, and this was judicious. She was sitting with their judges and hers.

But indecorous as a contrary habit would have been, and dull as the poor brutes must have been who did not feel this, I recently turned over a long string of paragraphs, the gist of which was her penury of praise, and her cruelty in refusing the sanction of her public approbation to those whom such a testimony would have benefited. The writers forgot that her coming presumed some expectation of being

entertained, and some little proof of being so is implied by a veteran performer's sitting out a whole play with unintermitted attention.

I shall not risk the doing injustice to persons long since departed whose practice was said to have been different—those who can censure what is really good are likely enough to invent authorities for what is bad in such cases. But if it is supposed that any of her rivals had the liberality to praise the talents of Mrs. Siddons, I am too well informed as to their greenroom sneers and friendly predictions of returning good sense in the public not to give such a notion the most decided negative.

That I have seen Mrs. Abington at Colman's applaud Miss Farren is certain; but no two actresses in the world differed more widely from each other than these two ladies, however they may have acted the same characters; besides, from circumstances, the greater actress might be rather serving herself than the beautiful successor to her refined cast in comedy. She also demonstrated how free she was from jealousy by this attention to a rival; the impression general in the house was that it was too strongly marked. I do not imagine that it was levelled at Mrs. Siddons, though among the writers attached to the Thalia of that period were usually found the bitterest censors of her serious sister. Something of a nature not quite theatrical might account for all this—the general reception of Mrs. Siddons in the fashionable world. The patronage of Mrs. Abington by ladies of rank was somewhat select.

During the summer recess Mrs. Siddons acted at Edinburgh eleven nights. I look upon the distinction she met with in that capital as one of her chief triumphs. There was, and always will be, found there an audience never surpassed in its intelligence—high alike in taste and knowledge. The number of first-rate professors, mingling much in society, renders polished life fond of literary attainments, and the public, in its very amusements, less gross than the more mixed audiences of London. The manager had only to state to them that his offers to the great actress had been of considerable weight to induce them at once to agree that the admission to the pit on her nights should be

five shillings. Nobody was idle enough to hint a doubt that the acting they then saw was infinitely more finished and perfect than any that they had witnessed. Her last impression was made in Euphrasia, a character of which the situations are always either brilliant or affecting. The truth is that Murphy was by no means more indebted in tragedy to French models than he was in comedy. In the former he grounded himself upon Crebillon, Voltaire, and Belloy, and in the latter mixed together Molière and Destouches; and in both obliged us with pieces admirably adapted to the stage. The real power of his own genius lies certainly in his farces. Yet he knew well the different characters of the two rival nations; and whatever he borrowed assumed the English dress with such perfect ease as to pass for native with those who did not demand a scrutiny.

Dublin and Cork succeeded, and the summer yielded, naturally enough, a harvest greatly beyond that of the winter season, even with its two benefits. Such incessant fatigue, however, became at last too much for her health, and part of her routine was given up. It could hardly be expected in these summer excursions that she could spare time to act for the benefits of performers, and, if she did, that she should do so unpaid would have been a palpable injustice to her family; but theatrical mouths in London were soon clamorous with outcries against the hardness of that heart that would not play for West Digges unless he paid her fifty pounds, and that had so turned against Brereton, her hero, her Jaffier, that even money would not propitiate her; she would not act for him at all, which blighted all his hopes, and greatly distressed both his circumstances and his mind. Here, therefore, was a strong and unlooked-for reinforcement to the clamour already noticed; and the theatrical world suggesting to the newspapers, a vast deal of the most positive assertion was poured out in the daily prints, which was canvassed in the morning at the tea-table, and the rest of the day occupied more of the general attention than any *ex parte* statement to the prejudice even of a gentleman ought to excite in liberal minds. But greatness is always in danger.

As to the performing for Mr. Digges in Dublin, it was

an affair of pure humanity. He was of a full habit, and in the month of July suffered a paralytic stroke, of which it was believed in town for some time that he had died; but he lingered to the end of the year 1786, and then expired at Cork. He had been near forty years upon the stage, and was greatly admired in characters of either force or feeling. Mr. Digges had not excited any great attention while acting here under Mr. Colman, and consequently it was less a personal regard to him than an envy to Mrs. Siddons that moved those who used his name against her reputation.

Brereton's case was of a different nature—he had greatly distinguished himself by acting here with her, and owed some valuable engagements to her preference. I know the deceiving nature of self-love, and how soon the auxiliary fancies that his principal could not exist without him. If a mind be quite sound, it will consider voluntary justice as a favour;[1] if it have a warp of vanity upon it, it will view even voluntary favour as a mere matter of justice. Now the voluntary favour intended Mr. Brereton was to take less from him than from any other performer for whom she acted. It might have been concluded that nothing was to be paid—some complaint seems to have arisen from irritated feelings, which a dispassionate consideration of all the circumstances disavowed, perhaps regretted. The effects, very disagreeable in their course, will be the very first subject noticed in the winter season of 1784-5.

In the meantime it may be agreeable to turn from the storm preparing for one sister to the more cheering prospect which just now opened to the other. Miss Kemble, as Mr. Steevens truly said, 'succeeded, at Colman's theatre, beyond the warmest expectations of her friends, in the very delicate part of Harriet, in *The Guardian*.' I have formerly observed, with proper feeling, upon the harshness with which her Almeria and Alicia were treated at Drury Lane Theatre, while sustaining the very terrible comparison with the powers of her greater sister on the same evenings. But it does seem to need some particular explanation, how,

[1] See Mr. Tooke's dedication of his great work to the University of Cambridge.

yielding at once the palm of tragedy to Miss Woollery, she came to accept the part of Harriet, in *The Guardian*, a comedy elegantly drawn by Garrick from the delightful *Pupille* (the Ward), a petite piece by Mons. Fagan.

To this choice the very beautiful young actress was directed by the judgment—very probably by the passion—of the celebrated commentator on Shakespeare, who, with great admiration of her accomplishments, professed now the deepest concern for her interest. Everything here bears a relation to the hopes which he certainly entertained; and, as he rehearsed with her the scenes between Heartly and Harriet, he flattered himself that the preference of the play might suggest a similar attachment of the pupil to the masterly and most insinuating instructor. Nor was the disparity greater as to the ages of the parties. Mr. Steevens was now in the forty-fourth year of his age, and possessed every advantage of mind, person, and fortune. When Hayley upon his monument inscribed these lines, those who remember the animation of his countenance will acquit him of posthumous flattery—

> 'Peace to these ashes! once the bright attire
> Of Steevens, sparkling with ætherial fire.'

A slight outline of the comedy will show that this illustration is not fanciful. Harriet, the ward of Heartly, is presumed by him to have fixed her affections upon a coxcomb of her own age; and although the young lady exhibits many palpable indications of a much graver choice, the almost paternal relation in which he stands to her, his maturity, and the inbred modesty of his character, remote from every tinct of personal vanity, repel from him the conception that she can possibly bestow her preference upon himself. The exquisite address of the French author enables him to parry the very plainest declarations that she can well make, and, in a scene of inimitable delicacy, she is driven to request him to write for her a letter intended as a disclosure to himself. She even touches upon his tender care of her infancy. This, though by no means applying to the coxcomb Clackit, he considers as escaping her

merely in her confusion, and, therefore, striking it out, closes the letter, and asks whether he shall send it. The answer is *naïve* even in English—'Yes, if you think I ought to send it.'

Perhaps few sounds were ever more agreeable to the ear of Steevens than those which the representative of Harriet uttered to her self-constituted guardian. But the male coquette probably never seriously sought a permanent engagement; and the prudence of the lady and her family soon broke off attentions equivocal in their object, and dangerous in their continuance. At no very distant period she gave her hand to Mr. Twiss, a gentleman of great merit,[1] and her son is the present Member in Parliament for Wootton Basset.[2] I recollect that Steevens, for some years, used to support in silence the very intelligible looks of her brother, Mr. Kemble. There is a head of this lady by Sir Joshua Reynolds, an admirable likeness, which for unaffected simplicity, sweetness, and clearness of the pencil, is perhaps one of his finest portraits. Some seasons back it was exhibited, with a splendid selection from the works of that great master, in the British Gallery, Pall Mall. It was placed not far from his grand work, Mrs. Siddons in the Tragic Muse; and as much surpassed it in accurate resemblance as it fell below it in magnificence of design and execution. There is a fame even beyond this distinction, and that is the memory of an amiable and useful life.

The appearance of Mrs. Siddons at Drury Lane Theatre in the winter season of 1784-5 was happily preceded by the return of Mr. King to the exercise of his professional duties, which he was presumed to have relinquished for a plan of retirement. Like other veteran professors, he possessed an unbounded veneration for the ornaments of

[1] All Shakespeareans acknowledge themselves infinitely indebted to the persevering diligence of Mr. Twiss. He completed a task of the most irksome toil—a Verbal Index to the works of Shakespeare. Every important word being exhibited in the classical mode, with all its recurrences, it becomes absolutely certain in what shades of meaning the great author indulged himself. Had this work existed from the time of Rowe, the rubbish of much early guessing at his sense would have been happily spared the present age. All our great early writers should have this indispensable conclusion to a careful reprint of their text.

[2] January 1826.

his earlier days; and as he had some little poetical talent he let his fancy loose among the precious recollections of the past, and did his best to imitate the following tender effusion, which Garrick, with so sure a taste, made the prologue to his, or rather Colman's, *Clandestine Marriage*. Holland, be it observed, was the speaker:—

'Oh, let me drop one tributary tear
On poor Jack Falstaff's grave and Juliet's bier!
You to their worth must testimony give;
'Tis in your hearts alone their fame can live.
Still as the scenes of life will shift away,
The strong impressions of their art decay.
Your children cannot feel what you have known;
They 'll boast of Quins and Cibbers of their own.'

The brilliant writer and unequalled actor were now to be remembered by an old friend, if not with equal power, by sincerity equally unquestionable, and Mr. King revived for a moment all he could revive, the name of departed genius. Nor was he a niggard as to existing excellence; but, with all the classical predilection of Milton, yet afforded his generous tribute of praise

'To what (though rare) of later age
Ennobled hath the buskin'd stage.'

The terms 'living worth' used by Mr. King were, one might think, sufficiently general to pass unquestioned by the most attentive audience; but a sort of dull demur might be felt rather than heard, upon this expression; and, perhaps, the actor and his spectators understood each other perfectly, the one as sounding their goodwill afar off, and the other as showing that, at present, they bore no decided portion of it to the lady in whose favour the experiment was made. No man stood better, however, with the town than Mr. King—it is difficult to describe him on such occasions—his vivacity had not what might be called hilarity about it; the smile seemed nearly banished from his expression; his effect was almost entirely in his utterance, which possessed an articulate velocity and smartness never heard but from him; and a collected confidence in himself that extorted an applause paid to the situation or the sentiment, rather than the man. Weston, Edwin, or Liston were antipodes to King. Give to either of these

humorists the ghost of a character, they invested its thinness in corporeal substance, or, to choose another illustration, an outline of figure was all that was wanting to their art; they infused into it the richness of their own comic imagination in aid of irresistible features, and completed the work designed by another hand. But to their successors such men can leave only the outline they received, and the future spectators see only the ghost of what delighted their fathers.

To return to the immediate subject—Mrs. Siddons's reappearance. While Mr. King thus expressed his managerial opinion of the 'living worth' which had been so rudely questioned, her husband, under whose directions she might fairly be presumed to act, as every theatrical engagement could only be made by him or by his power, caused the following letter to be inserted in the principal London newspapers.

'The following is an answer to the scandalous stories lately circulated to the prejudice of Mrs. Siddons's private character.

'TO THE PRINTER.

'SIR,—I am unused to write for public inspection, but I will not hesitate to state the truth, and I think the generous and candid will excuse the rest. I therefore declare that Mrs. Siddons never wished, asked, nor accepted a single farthing from Mr. Digges; and that, a few days after his benefit, that gentleman acknowledged his obligations to her by a very polite note, which Mrs. Siddons (not expecting so malignant an attack) destroyed.

'With regard to Mr. Brereton, so far from refusing to perform for him, she agreed to do it for a much smaller sum than she was to receive from any other comedian, though every performer for whom she played gave her considerably less than the manager paid her nightly, for twenty nights together; but just as the benefits were commencing she was taken ill, and confined to her bed nearly a fortnight. When she recovered, her strength would not permit her to perform immediately more than

three nights a week: and as the manager expected his engagement fulfilled, and was to leave Dublin at a particular time, she was obliged to forego the performing for Mr. Brereton; she, after that, made another attempt to serve him; why it failed, Mr. Brereton can truly tell; but, I will be bold to assert, without affording the smallest ground for any charge against Mrs. Siddons. These are solemn facts on which I leave the public to judge. Animadversions on her public performance and the questioning of her professional talents I shall ever submit to, feeling that those who so liberally reward her exertions have the best right to judge of their degree of merit, and to praise or censure them as they think proper; but all attacks upon her private conduct that, if unnoticed, would deservedly lower her in the estimation of the public, and render her less worthy of their favour and kindness, I hold myself bound to answer. W. SIDDONS.

'*Thursday, September* 30.'

The date, but that might be accident, is that of the day on which Mr. King made his compliments to her from the stage. The line of the actor almost required explanation itself—the letter of her husband gave explanation enough as to Mr. Digges, but left much to be desired, to use a French formulary, as to Mr. Brereton. It is in truth such a one as might be expected from one unused to write for public inspection—but the importance of the occasion seemed to call for an exertion of a different character. I think it very clear that her brother, Mr. Kemble, never saw it in manuscript. It did not hold her high enough—it wanted both force and point, it was gossiping and familiar; and there was something almost ludicrous in his declarations of 'submitting to any animadversion on her public performance, and the questioning of her professional talents.' Submission to an unavoidable tenure needs no declaration, and is accepted as no concession. That he holds himself bound to answer all attacks upon her private conduct is a position as little needed as the former; it was her professional conduct that was concerned in playing or not playing for two members of the profession.

That she took less from every actor for whom she played than the manager gave her for twenty nights together, and that Brereton was to be still higher favoured, or rated lower, was a miserable detail, and unfit for the public eye. The valuable consideration for valuable aid we know must be had, but it is in all cases irksome both to give it and receive it publicly. The lawyer's fee is left happily with his clerk, the physician awkwardly waves for it as he retires, and turns away his face as he takes it. All that could be necessary was to give the mere fact of her illness and the confinement which it occasioned—the rest was misfortune, for which she had many ways of compensating Mr. Brereton.

But the worst symptom of the case was the churlishness of the letter which Mr. Brereton was at last induced to write:—

'TO THE PRINTER OF THE PUBLIC ADVERTISER.

'*Sunday, Oct.* 3, 1784.

'Sir,—By inserting the following (which will of itself prove my authority) in your paper of to-morrow, you will very much oblige.—Yours, etc.

'WILLIAM SIDDONS.'

'SIR,—I am concerned to find Mrs. Siddons has suffered in the public opinion on my account. I have told you before, and I again repeat it, that to the friends I have seen I have taken pains to exculpate her from the least unkindness to me in Dublin. I acknowledge she did agree to perform at my benefit for a less sum than for any other performer, but her illness prevented it; and that she would have played for me after that had not the night been appointed after she had played three times in the same week —and that the week after her illness—and I am very willing you shall publish this letter, if you think it will be of the least service to Mrs. Siddons, to whom I am proud to own many obligations of friendship.—I am, Sir, your very humble servant. W. BRERETON.

'To Mr. Siddons,
Gower Street.'

'Mr. Siddons cannot withhold his public thanks from Mr. Brereton for his obliging letter, and he has no doubt but that Mr. Digges will in a little time furnish Mrs. Siddons with another written testimony, that will entirely confound the artful schemes of her detractors.'

With all this pride of obligation, did it become a generous man to be besieged upon such a subject? He alone could not be ignorant of the long altercation before the public, of which he was the cause. To explain to the friends he has seen was nothing—the 'pains to exculpate' should have filed along with the public attacks upon her. The inference in most minds was, that he had once angrily vented his disappointment in the language of censure, and had now seen reason to question his discretion or his justice. Like Eolus, himself, he had loosed a tempest which his desire could not still so easily as it was excited.

Mr. Siddons publicly expressed his thanks for this obliging letter. He might almost have exclaimed with King Lear—

> 'This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
> On things would hurt me more.'

During the very week after her illness (that illness which annulled her first attempt to serve him) she acted three times; and Mr. Brereton's night being unaccountably fixed in the same week, the second attempt was as impracticable as the former. Mr. Brereton was a first-rate actor of that day—how did it happen that he allowed his night to be so predicamented? Why was it accompanied with a condition that rendered it nugatory? The youngest branch of the Daggerwood family would not permit his benefit to be fixed on the second day of Epsom races.

It has occurred to me to witness the dreadful exertion of some performers in characters of the highest power. I have seen them stretched out and exhausted, and needing much time to restore their wasted strength and spirits. I, therefore, can feel no surprise when a lady, recent from a sick chamber, is unable to act more than three times in one week. I continued, indeed, to think the profession labori-

ous, until a great actor of our own times undertook to act Hamlet or Harlequin, I forget which, possibly both, twice on the same day for a week, perhaps weeks together.

The letter of Mr. Brereton had certainly done no good: it wanted warmth; there was latent bile about it; a child might discern that the parties were not upon the same friendly footing as they had once been. He had formerly made sure of being carried along with her as the favourite hero in tragedy; but her brother was now in the theatre, and the powerful influence of both united to secure for Mr. Kemble every part which he could be ambitious to play—Venice might be preserved, but Jaffier was lost for ever.

The reader will find yet another letter from this gentleman; but, like the shades that were shown to the eye of Macbeth, but which 'grieved his heart,' the 'second was like the former'; and by the way of explanation asserted, in general terms only, what the letter which had not been clearly understood exhibited even in detail.

'TO THE PRINTER OF THE PUBLIC ADVERTISER.

'SIR,—Having been informed that the letter signed by me in the several morning papers of yesterday, respecting Mrs. Siddons's conduct to me while in Ireland, has not been so clearly understood as it was both the intention on my part and justice to her that it should, I think it necessary again to repeat that it was in no respect owing to Mrs. Siddons that I had no benefit in Ireland; but, on the contrary, that in the course of a long and dangerous illness I received proofs of friendship from her which I shall ever recollect with gratitude, and avow now with sincere satisfaction.

W. BRERETON.

'*October* 5, 1784.'

I know nothing so severely mortifying in life as this condition of an actor's profession, that he has occasionally to meet an audience prepared to revile or insult him, perhaps endanger his very existence; and that the almost awful respect paid to his genius at one time is, for something or for nothing, thrown to the passing winds, and he

is assailed like the vilest of mankind. Something more liberal, at all events more dignified, might be looked for from the visitors of a theatre royal; but touch any of the passions strongly, and all are mob alike. A feeling mind cannot avoid considering the mortification which must have depressed the great mistress of our affections as she got into her carriage to proceed to the theatre on the afternoon of the 5th of October. She would be reminded, *mutatis mutandis*, of the pathetic remonstrance of Shakespeare's inimitable Richard the Second, addressed to the ungentle Northumberland:—

> 'Must I do so? and must I ravel out
> My weav'd up follies? Gentle Northumberland,
> If thy offences were upon record,
> Would it not shame thee, in so fair a troop,
> To read a lecture of them?'

Her choice of Mrs. Beverley for the occasion gave her brother, Mr. Kemble, an opportunity of leading her before the audience; so that when the curtain rose they advanced together. There was an advantage even in the simple attire of Mrs. Beverley; the robe and the tiara of the heroine would have seemed braving or farcical before a people who disdained to govern their roaring throats, and grumbled everything but pity.

At this time, in the full vigour of youth, I dined in the neighbourhood, and made a point of obtaining my favourite position in the pit. I was too near her to have any other feelings than those of respect for the grave composure and unaffected dignity of her manner, only yielding at intervals to the grateful acknowledgment of that applause which tried to drown the clamours of her enemies.

Mr. Kemble had long been studied in these popular exhibitions, and, finding that for the present nothing was likely to be done, he wisely concluded that her absence was most likely to decide the house in her favour; and, repeating their respects in the usual mannner, he led her off the stage, and left her noisy assailants to consider. After some interval the calls for her became less mixed with opposition than before, and she came again on the stage, but alone; and deliberately advancing to the very

front, with all the self-possession of truth, and the inimitable grace which always attended her, thus addressed the audience :—

'LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—The kind and flattering partiality which I have uniformly experienced in this place would make the present interruption distressing to me indeed, were I in the slightest degree conscious of having deserved your censure. I feel no such consciousness. The stories which have been circulated against me are calumnies. When they shall be proved to be true my aspersers will be justified; but, till then, my respect for the public leads me to be confident that I shall be protected from unmerited insult.'

It was not very usual to hear a lady on such occasions; the delicacy of the sex, while it becomes accustomed to repeat the sentiments of others, shrinks from the seeming boldness of publicly uttering their own. But there was a male dignity in the understanding of Mrs. Siddons that raised her above the helpless timidity of other women; and it was certainly without surprise, and evidently with profound admiration, that they heard this noble being assert her innocence and demand protection.

'Intestine war no more our passions wage,
And giddy factions hear away their rage.'

The extensive view I am taking of the professional course of this great woman offers various points to my selection, and we can rarely judge with entire accuracy of the feelings of others; but, if I were to mark the moment which I should think she most frequently revolved, as affording her the greatest satisfaction, the fortitude of this night, and its enthusiastic reception by all who heard and saw it, seem most worthily to claim so happy a distinction.

But the firmness that sustained her while before the audience a little failed her when she retired to her dressing-room. To afford the agitated nerves a short season for composure, Mr. King, the manager, now requested a few minutes indulgence; and the necessity to become

somebody else soon restored her to herself. The attack upon her was quelled by her seasonable resolution, and poor Digges soon completed the evidence of its injustice, as well as cruelty, by making his son write for him 'that he had paid to Mrs. Siddons no money whatever, and had written a letter expressing his obligation to her; that, as he understood it had been mislaid, he with great pleasure repeated his acknowledgments.'

The more I reflect upon this affair, the more astonished I am that Brereton, who acted Lewson this very evening in the play, neither came voluntarily forward, nor was called for, to my remembrance, by the audience. If his letter was deemed unsatisfactory, and he knew that what he intended to amend it could not appear till the day following, when he heard a shower of revilings whistling about the head of a lady to whom he was so proud to profess his obligations, what so natural, so manly, or so proper, as to step forward with frankness and spirit, and assure the people, from authority that could not be questioned, 'that he had never sanctioned, by a murmur, the calumny of which he was the subject; that no attempts, if such could be made, would ever induce him to palter in any declaration called for by the public: that Mrs. Siddons had done all, and more than he had any right to look for, and that this would always be his feeling with respect to her?'

For some time after annoyance constantly attended her coming upon the stage. She used to acknowledge by a reverence the applause by which it was overborne, and go on steadily with the character; but it flattened her manner for a few evenings. Before the subject of provincial benefits is quite dropped, I confess I somewhat doubt the propriety of an opinion formerly delivered by me, and think more favourably of the right of leading actors to the aid of such stars as occupy the public attention strongly. When such a prodigy for instance as Mrs. Siddons has been acting for twenty nights anywhere, what chance is there that a profitable house can be obtained without her? Besides, if such aid be of vital importance to him who is assisted, it should not be forgotten that it is one source of

profit also to the great actress herself. Some cases will now and then arise which properly claim a service perfectly disinterested. They afford a consolation which can never be weakened, in whatever circumstances we may be placed.

> 'One self-approving hour whole years outweighs
> Of stupid starers and of loud huzzas.'

It was on the 3rd of November that Mrs. Siddons added to her impression the full display of regal majesty, by the performance of Margaret of Anjou in the tragedy of *The Earl of Warwick*. This play was an imitation, without acknowledgment, by Dr. Thomas Franklin, of the much-admired *Comte de Warwick* of Laharpe. The French author had the mortification to see the tender interest in his piece frittered away, and a figurative invasion upon his style, which he piqued himself upon keeping pure and natural. The metaphoric mode of the English play he ascribes to the English taste—that the figures are sometimes low and trivial he properly imputes to Franklin himself.

Succeeding Mrs. Yates in the character of the Queen of our Sixth Henry, I should conceive, from the boldness of her style, that Mrs. Siddons still more resembled Dumesnil, the heroine of Laharpe, in 1763—to whom the grateful author paid an elegant tribute, which closed with these four lines :—

> ' Poursuis ; et règne encor sur la scène ennoblie ;
> Elle assure à ton nom un éclat éternel.
> Il n'est rien de sublime, il n'est rien d'immortel
> Que la nature et le génie.'

Mrs. Siddons had unluckily fallen upon an age too cold or weak to pay her such a compliment, however great were her exertions. During the period of my personal observation the stage has possessed nothing of an original or highly poetic character. At the time I am writing the same unacknowledged plunder of the French stage is going on as is stigmatised above in the year 1766. We are not in the condition of men whose ancestors are unknown—our dramatic forefathers are immortal; but their descendants die either smothered in the birth or never attaining maturity.

The Earl of Warwick is now remembered only by schoolboys, for its long-sword fencing match in the scene between Edward and Warwick, which has often alarmed the visitors of the spouting seminaries about town. This is no bad specimen of that pointed and, perhaps, Gothic taste which, however condemned as artificial, suits the temper of an English audience. Smart altercation seems to keep the interest alive, for the tender emotions are all languid when protracted.

It is amusing to hear the young Frenchman, Laharpe, echoing the fierce spirit of the North. Scotland somewhat elevates the tone of the Gallic Muse.

> 'Et du haut de ses monts, contre un joug qui l'offense,
> Lutte et défend encor sa fière indépendance.'

The next choice made for Mrs. Siddons was also from the French school, the character of Zara in the play of that name. This was the initiatory part of her tender predecessor, Mrs. Cibber—an actress with whom, if our fathers can be credited, Mrs. Siddons might be compared, at least for the early part of her course. When the enlargement of her figure and the strength of her features disinclined her to the youthful heroine, she showed that she could be Pritchard as well as Cibber, and astonish the minds by her force which she had subdued by her softness.

But the effects produced on the first appearance of Hill's *Zara* at Drury Lane Theatre in 1736 could not revive again. Mrs. Siddons performed Zara on two following Wednesdays, and certainly exerted herself greatly; but Voltaire, however deeply he had felt the passion of Shakespeare's *Othello*, was little disposed to borrow any of the bustle of that play; and the modern audiences at least thought *Zara* cold and declamatory. It may be as well to observe, too, that Milward at first, and Garrick afterwards, had made very powerful effect in the part of Lusignan: the secret how to do so appears to have expired with them. I once saw Henderson try it, and I suppose as closely as he could bring himself to Garrick—but he was not regal, and barely venerable. He had that within which could not impress his exterior.

On the 2nd of December, Cumberland's tragedy of *The Carmelite*, in The Lady of St. Vallori, afforded our heroine a new and even a powerful character, but not strongly diversified from some other parts which she was in the habit of acting, and lining almost exactly with Lady Randolph in *Douglas*. Mrs. Siddons acted with great dignity and pathos, but subjected herself to the wonderful acumen of a critic, who thus expressed himself:—'She exerted herself greatly, but gave no new specimens of her art. The most interesting situations of the play are similar to those in *Isabella* and *Douglas*, where she has already been seen; and she is too guarded and methodical in her manner of performance to colour the same subject in different styles.'

This I consider to be the highest compliment that malice or folly ever paid, when it meant to decry. Where the same situations recur in the subject, and no discriminations of character are afforded by the author, the styles of performance cannot be different when the original manner was drawn from actual nature; because this would be a gross error in philosophy, where the effects should be different, the causes remaining exactly the same. But nothing can be more unfounded than the remark. The character, though in its leading features, the passion of the scene and the relations of life, going parallel with others, is discriminated much by manners, and something by object. She breeds up Montgomeri to avenge his father—the principle of chivalry is strong in this drama. It has the gloom which seem to hover over Norman castles—their impenetrable secrecy, their murky terrors. The Lady of St. Vallori is also deeply coloured by the piety or, as I suppose I must term it, the superstition of her times. You see nothing of this in *Douglas*, though accurately it should have been there. Authors often forget the world before the Reformation. One might think they had a descendant of Knox for the licenser of the North—so utterly divested is Home's play of everything Catholic.

I therefore hazard little in affirming that so far was either her caution or her method from imposing sameness upon the great genius of the stage, that the fable, and not

the actress, alone recalled the characters compared with the Lady of St. Vallori. The catastrophes, however, essentially differ; and in *The Carmelite* moral and poetical justice are the same. The husband returns to happiness; the son does not perish; and the hideous Hildebrand alone presses the green floorcloth of dramatic expiation. But happiness and tragedy seldom will unite, and the great efficacy of the stage is the tear for expiring virtue.

Mr. Kemble, in the early part of his life, was much devoted to the writings of that mild and moral poet, Massinger. The purity of his style, and his peculiar eloquence, seem to have first excited his attention; and, for the purposes of the lecturer, I know no dramatic author who affords more perfect matter for selection. He considered *The Maid of Honour* to be worthy of the talents of Mrs. Siddons; and, but that the interest of the piece was restricted entirely to calculated and balanced affection, and the most imperious of the passions submitted to the discipline of an affected honour, there is matter demanding such an artist; though to a mixed audience the whole play may seem brilliant only

'With the moonshine's watery beams.'

Camiola is, in the opinion of Dr. Ireland, a character of infinite value. 'Everywhere she animates us with her spirit, and instructs us with her sense. Yet this superiority takes nothing from her softer feelings. Her tears flow with a mingled fondness and regret, and she is swayed by a passion which is only quelled by her greater resolution.'

The grossness of the author's age has tainted her reproof to Fulgentio with a little too much muscular preference in the person of a lover. I dare only touch upon the lighter requisites, of complexion, and so on—

'Give me the lovely brown,
A thick curl'd hair of the same die, broad shoulders,
A brawny arm full of veins, a leg without
An artificial calf.'

She is sometimes coarse even to a proverb—

'Rich you are,
Devilish rich, as 'tis reported, and sure have
The aids of Satan's little fiends to get it;
And what is got upon his back, must be
Spent you know where—the proverb 's stale.'

But Kemble knew well what to do with stuff like this. And the inimitable actress knew equally well how to improve and sharpen points of a finer temper. In the 4th scene in the 4th act there were some transcendent touches of this kind. To the king, upon an unworthy accusation which had escaped him—

'*Cam.* With your leave, I must not kneel, Sir,
When I reply to this; but thus rise up
In my defence, tell you, as a man,' etc.

Again, at a short distance, where the thoughts approach the magnificence of Shakespeare himself:—

'But, be no more a king,
Unless you do me right. Burn your decrees,
And of your laws and statutes make a fire,
To thaw the frozen numbness of delinquents,
If he escape unpunish'd.'

But how preserve the noble grace with which she turned upon the Duchess, her rival, who insulted her with 'self-comparison?'

'*Aurel.* Yes; the object,
Look on it better, lady, may excuse
The change of his affection.
'*Cam.* The object!
In what?—forgive me, modesty, if I say
You look upon your form in the false glass
Of flattery and self-love, and that deceives you.'[1]

But she is too unhappy to sustain this important tone, and the following check was delivered with a truth that thrilled to the very soul:—

[1] A young writer should be made to observe the beauty of the expression 'forgive me, modesty,' where it occurs. It was so at hand to use the term of cold respect, Madam, when addressing Aurelia. She has, however, then a higher appeal. The reverse of sentiment brings it out lower down, with a quiet sinking of the spirits—'No, Madam, I recant.'

'*Cam.* Down, proud heart!
Why do I rise up in defence of that
Which in my cherishing of it hath undone me?
No, Madam, I recant—you are all beauty,
Goodness, and virtue; and poor I not worthy
As a foil to set you off.
But though to all men else I did appear
The shame and scorn of women, he stands bound
To hold me as the masterpiece.'

I must, however, bid farewell to *The Maid of Honour*, who certainly never had a more fascinating representative, I allow myself but one more literary illustration, excited by the following remark of Dr. Ireland: 'If the reader will compare the speech of Paulo with the Penseroso, he cannot fail to remark a similarity in the cadences, as well as in the measure and the solemnity of the thoughts.' Nothing can be more ingenious than this observation. It is, however, much strengthened by finding the expression, which in Milton's *Comus* startled some of his commentators, 'She fables not,' in this very play of *The Maid of Honour*, which appeared in print in 1632, and so preceded, by two years, the Mask at Ludlow Castle.

'*Camiola.* I fable not.'—Act 2, scene 2.

CHAPTER XV

It has been said that, since the *Eumenides* of Æschylus, tragic poetry had produced nothing so terrible and sublime as the *Macbeth* of Shakespeare. It may be said with equal probability that, since the happy invention of man invested dramatic fiction with seeming reality, nothing superior, perhaps equal, to the Lady Macbeth of Mrs. Siddons has been seen.

She had experienced much of the illiberality of criticism, to which it seems not to have suited her temper or taste through life to pay any court. The distributors of daily and monthly fame had not scrupled to assert that the sagacious actress, conscious of the limits of her powers, had wisely avoided the boundless demands of Shakespeare, and devoted herself to the tender effusions of inferior spirits; that a melodious flow of declamation was a happiness but of the ear; a majestic person and an expressive as well as beautiful countenance accidental advantages of nature; but that the burst of passion, the bold inspiration of positive genius, superior to all precedent and trammel and tuition, of these gifts she had positively nothing, and was of a temperament too cold and systematic ever to suspect even the want of them.

To use the language of the late Dr. Parr when speaking of Warburton, on the 2nd of February, 1785, 'from her towering and distant heights she rushed down upon her prey, and, disdaining the ostentatious prodigalities of cruelty, destroyed it at a blow.' She acted Lady Macbeth on that night, and criticism and envy and rivalry sunk at once before her. The subject was as fortunate to her as to the great poet himself, and from that hour her dominion over

the passions was undisputed, her genius pronounced to be at least equal to her art, and Sir Joshua's happy thought of identifying her person with the Muse of Tragedy confirmed by the immutable decree of the public.

The reader or spectator of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is not inquisitive as to his real history, and would not be a little surprised were it laid before him. The gracious Duncan, too, besieging Durham without success, is said, soon after his return, to have been slain by his people, thus closing a rather inglorious reign of only six years. The death, on which his immortality was built, is assigned by the celebrated *Chronicon Elegiacum.*

But astonishment will succeed surprise, for the reader is next to learn that the epithet 'gracious' is quite as applicable to Macbeth himself as to Duncan; and the 'historic doubts' as to Richard the Third may be revived, on perhaps surer ground, in relation to the actual qualities of the usurper of Scotland. 'He seems,' says a learned inquirer, 'to have been an able and beneficent prince. The *Chron. Eleg.* represents fertile seasons as attendants of his reign, which Winton confirms. If a king makes fertile seasons it must be by promoting agriculture and diffusing among his people the blessings of peace. Had he paid more attention to his own interests, and less to those of his subjects, the crown might have remained in his family. But, neglecting the practice of war, he fell a martyr to his own virtues.'[1]

But, if he was really guilty of the murder of Duncan, he took at least the usual road of expiation, for he certainly made a pilgrimage to Rome in the papacy of Leo the Ninth.

'All this tyme was gret plenté,
Habundande bathe on lande and se:
He was in justice richt lauchful,
And til his legis al awfulle.
Quhen Pape was Leo the Nynt in Rome,
As pilgryme to the court he come;
And in his alms he sew silver
Til al pur folk, that had myster.
In al time oysit he to wyrk
Profetabilly for haly kirk.'

WINTON, VI. 29.

[1] See Mr. Pinkerton's *Enquiry*, vol. ii. p. 197.

It was to gratify Malcolm III. and his descendants that he was represented, like Caliban, to be the son of a devil, and connected with witches. Happily for us, Shakespeare, as to these often-compared tyrants, Richard and Macbeth, was acquainted only with the histories written under the patronage of their enemies. Macbeth was supplanted at last by a foreign force, and reigned in great tranquillity seventeen years.

Particulars so curious and so little known I would not suppress. They suggest to my mind one important reflection. In the play of *Macbeth* the hurry which presses on the events of his life, from his coronation to his death, allows the poet little time to dilate upon the particular disposition of such a man; yet I cannot but think that had he known of this pious excursion he would have made fine use of it in the gloomy reveries of Macbeth, have shown him struggling between the efficacy of religious ceremony and magical illusion, and that it would have supplied some dreadful images to the perturbed slumbers of his more fiend-like wife.

The first scene of Lady Macbeth is decisive of the whole character. She lets out in a few lines the daring steadiness of her mind, which could be disturbed by no scruple, intimidated by no danger. The occasion does not change the nature here as it does in her husband. There is no struggle after any virtue to be resigned. She is as thoroughly prepared in one moment as if visions of greatness had long informed her slumbers, and she had awaked to meditate upon every means, however dreadful, that could secure her object.

When Mrs. Siddons came on with the letter from Macbeth (the first time we saw her), such was the impression from her form, her face, her deportment—the distinction of sex was only external—'her spirits' informed their tenement with the apathy of a demon. The commencement of this letter is left to the reader's imagination. 'They met me in the day of success,' shows that he had previously mentioned the witches. Her first novelty was a little suspension of the voice, 'they made themselves—air': that is, less astonished at it as a miracle of nature than attentive to

it as a manifestation of the reliance to be built upon their assurances. She read the whole letter with the greatest skill, and, after an instant of reflection, exclaimed—

> 'Glamis thou art, and Cawdor—and shalt be
> What thou art promised.'

The amazing burst of energy upon the words 'shalt be' perfectly electrified the house. The determination seemed as uncontrollable as fate itself. The searching analysis of Macbeth which she makes was full of meaning—the eye and the hand confirmed the logic. Ambition is the soul of her very phrase—

> 'Thou'dst have, great Glamis.'

Great Glamis! this of her husband! metaphysical speculation, calculated estimate—as if it had regarded Cæsar or Pompey. He is among the means before me—how is such a nature to be worked up to such unholy objects?

'Hie thee hither,' says the impatience which longs to begin its strife with the antagonist virtue—'Hie thee hither,

> 'That I may pour *my* spirits in thine ear,
> And chastise with the valour of my tongue,' etc.

But a different style of beauty was called forth by the hasty entrance of a servant to announce the coming of the King that night into the very meshes she is about to spread for his destruction. Shakespeare alone, perhaps, would have written the daring compromise of all decorum which bursts from the exulting savage upon this intelligence—

> 'Thou 'rt mad to say it.'

Aware of the inference to be drawn from an earnestness so marked, he immediately cloaks the passion with a reason why the intelligence could not seem true. The actress, fully understanding the process, after the violence of the exclamation, recovered herself with slight alarm, and in a lowered tone proposed a question suited to the new feeling:—

> 'Is not thy master with him? who, were 't so,
> Would have inform'd for preparation.'

The murmured mysteriousness of the address to the spirits 'that tend on mortal thoughts' became stronger as she proceeded :—

> 'Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers.'

A beautiful thought, be it observed; as if these sources of infant nourishment could not even consent to mature destruction without some loathsome change in the very stream itself which flowed from them.

When the actress, invoking the destroying ministers, came to the passage—

> 'Wherever in your sightless substances
> You wait on nature's mischief,'

the elevation of her brows, the full orbs of sight, the raised shoulders, and the hollowed hands, seemed all to endeavour to explore what yet were pronounced no possible objects of vision. Till then, I am quite sure, a figure so terrible had never bent over the pit of a theatre, that night crowded with intelligence and beauty in its seven front rows.

The salutation of Macbeth—the remark upon the abstraction on his countenance which follows her brief intimation of all that is to be done—all claimed notice.

> 'O never
> Shall sun that morrow see.'

Macbeth himself (Smith) sunk under her at once, and she quitted the scene with an effect which cannot be described; in short, the triumph of Nature, rightly interpreted by the greatest writer and greatest actress that had ever laboured for the delight and instruction of mankind.

The following scene is the beautiful reception of Duncan at Inverness. The honoured hostess received his Majesty with all the exterior of profound obligation. She was too pure an actress to allow a glance of triumph to stray towards the spectators.

Macbeth, conscious of his design, is even neglectful of his duty as a host; he is absent from the royal banquet, and his absence provokes inquiry. His lady, bending steadily to her purpose, is equal to all occasions, and now

breaks in upon her husband's fearful rumination. He had determined to proceed no further in the business, and she has again to revive the unholy flame which gratitude had quenched. She assails him with sophistry and contempt and female resolution, seemingly superior to all manly daring. She quotes his own bolder against his present self, and urges the infamy of receding from so proud a design. Filled from the crown to the toe with direst cruelty, the horror of the following sentence seemed bearable from its fitness to such a being. But I yet wonder at the energy of both utterance and action with which it was accompanied :—

> 'I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
> Have done to this.'

There was no qualifying with our humanity in the tone or gesture. This really beautiful and interesting actress did not at all shrink from standing before us the true and perfect image of the greatest of all natural and moral depravations—a fiend-like woman.

The scene after the murder exhibits Lady Macbeth as bold in action as she had, during speculation, asserted herself to be. 'Give *me* the daggers' excited a general start from those around me. Upon her return from the chamber of slaughter, after gilding the faces of the grooms, from the peculiar character of her lip she gave an expression of contempt more striking than any she had hitherto displayed.

From the third scene of the second act Lady Macbeth has long been banished, so that we had no opportunity of seeing how the highly-wrought agonies of Macbeth would have stood contrasted by the delicate affectation of his wife. But the natural exclamation of Macduff—

> 'O Banquo! Banquo!
> Our royal master 's murder'd,'

excites one from Lady Macbeth which I should like, I confess, to have heard from Mrs. Siddons :—

> 'Woe, alas! what! in our house?'

'This,' says Warburton, 'is very fine. Had she been innocent nothing but the murder itself, and not any of its aggravating circumstances, would naturally have affected her. As it was, her business was to appear highly disordered at the news. Therefore, like one who has her thoughts about her, she seeks for an aggravating circumstance that might be supposed most to affect her personally, not considering that by placing it there she discovered rather a concern for herself than for the king. On the contrary, her husband, who had repented the act, and was now labouring under the horrors of a recent murder, in his exclamation gives all the marks of sorrow for the fact itself.'

The introduction of Lady Macbeth in this scene must depend entirely upon the credit which the actress has with the audience. Coarse hypocrisy excites derision. Garrick would not trust Mrs. Pritchard with either the astonishment or the seeming swoon. Macklin thought Mrs. Porter alone could have been endured by the audience. I feel equally confident with regard to Mrs. Siddons. There Lady Macbeth ought most assuredly to be. She is the last of human beings to have absented herself on such an occasion as a night alarm, because her absence could not fairly be accounted for in the first place; and, in the second, she had fully prepared her mind to act what she thought the occasion demanded. The upper gallery should never be the guide where a manager is himself worthy of Shakespeare. What he shows may always be shown; the temperaments of person and manner are all that the manager is to take care of. Liston in the Fool certainly could not be trusted by the side of King Lear, but Farren might. The dryness of the one actor would add to the effect of Lear's madness; the irresistible countenance of the other would confound all sensibility in immoderate laughter.

By the second scene of the third act, we find that the possession of his object had rendered Macbeth moody and solitary. Their attention while apart seems to have been directed to the same object; for his Queen, on her entrance, immediately inquires whether Banquo be gone from court? She is ready to suggest the murder of that

nobleman and his son. 'In them nature's copy's not eterne.' But she soon learns the mistake of the adage, *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus.* The first crime in Macbeth hath the greatest extent. He has no prelude of insect destruction, like Domitian. For his own good 'all causes' must give way. He would not leave a virtue alive. She recommends him to be bright and jovial among his guests that night at the banquet. To which scene we hasten to look at the manner of our great actress. 'Mrs. Pritchard,' says Davies, 'showed consummate art in endeavouring to hide Macbeth's frenzy from the observation of his guests, by drawing their attention to conviviality. She smiled on one, whispered to another, and distantly saluted a third; in short, she practised every possible artifice to hide the transaction that passed between her husband and the vision his disturbed imagination had raised. Her reproving and angry looks, which glanced towards Macbeth, at the same time were mixed with marks of inward vexation and uneasiness.'

I should think Mr. Davies, from his minuteness of observation, must have figured there as one of the nobles, only a few covers from the royal state. But the truth is, a great deal of this is impossible—there has been no time for it—the lords observe as soon as anything occurs to excite attention, as the text shows us:—

'*Macb.* The table's full.
Len. Here is a place reserv'd, Sir.
Macb. Where?
Len. Here, my good lord. What is 't that moves your highness?
Macb. Which of you have done this?
Lords What, my good lord!'

On Rosse's calling upon them to rise, his highness not being well, Lady Macbeth desires them to keep their seats—explains his malady, which notice only augments; begs them to feed, and regard him not; and then coming down to Macbeth, endeavours to baffle his terrors. Davies closes the eulogium thus: 'When, at last, as if unable to support her feelings any longer, she rose from her seat, and, with a half-whisper of terror, said "Are you a man?" she

assumed a look of anger, indignation, and contempt, not to be surpassed.'

This is very far from being clearly put; a half-whisper of terror, attended by a look of anger, indignation, and contempt, is a rather singular mode of encouraging dismay. The whisper is for concealment of what is said from others; but the words whispered are a reproach, and something more, incompatible with terror. She is so much mistress of herself as even to assail him with ridicule. His conviction is 'proper stuff,' the 'painting of fear'—the 'air-drawn dagger' 'which, he said, led him to Duncan.' Such flaws and starts as became only a story told by a woman at a winter's fire, under the wise authority of a grandam. 'When all's done, he look'd but on a stool.' But so it is, without perfect recollection of the scenes, praise is drawn from the imagination rather than the fact, and much is imputed which was never done by the actress; and, if it had been done, would have merited no commendation.

The greater beauties of Mrs. Siddons's manner were to be found, I think, in the—

> 'Think of this, good peers,
> But as a thing of custom: 'tis no other;
> Only it spoils the pleasure of the time.'

And the rapidly cutting down the question from Rosse—'What sights, my lord?'

> '*Lady M.* I pray you speak not; he grows worse and worse;
> Question enrages him: at once good night:
> Stand not upon the order of your going,
> But go at once.'

The address displayed here drew down a thunder of applause.

The task of Lady Macbeth is here finished; as the great tempter she has done her office, and her husband must now defend, by military skill and bravery, the crown which his crimes have acquired and hazarded. But Shakespeare has one more terrible lesson to give; namely, to show that, when the force of volition is withdrawn, the fancy becomes a dreadful victim to the images of past guilt; and she who waking can dispel her husband's terrors and her

own, in sleep beholds her bleeding victims for ever present, and the circumstances of their fate passing continually in their original order.[1]

In the performance of this scene, Mrs. Siddons differed essentially from every other actress. I will explain myself. The actresses previous to herself seemed to consider such a perturbation as not possessing full power upon the frame; they, therefore, rather glided than walked, and every other action had a feebler character than is exhibited by one awake. Their figure, too, was kept perpendicularly erect, and the eye, though open, studiously avoided motion.

But the theory of somnambulism is somewhat at variance with the stage exhibition; and if the doctor of physic who attends upon Lady Macbeth had been very profound in his art, he would have considered the eyes being open as the most extraordinary part of the scene before him. The cases quoted in our books all state the sleep-walker to have his eyes closed. It is only when any object of his fancy has been removed from its expected place that the eyes are feebly unclosed, as if to find the position of it, and are immediately shut, to leave the fancy to control entirely its own operations. It has been observed that the iris on such occasions appears fixed, and the eye dim.

Mrs. Siddons seemed to conceive the fancy as having equal power over the whole frame, and all her actions had the wakeful vigour; she laded the water from the imaginary ewer over her hands—bent her body to listen to the sounds presented by her fancy, and hurried to resume the taper where she had left it, that she might with all speed drag her pallid husband to their chamber. The excellent Dugald Stewart, thinks that 'in the somnambuli, the mind

[1] Schlegel just touches upon this scene, with a high compliment to the poet:—'Shakespeare est peut-être le seul poète qui caractérise les maladies de l'âme, la melancholie, la folie, le somnambulisme, avec une parfaite vérité; elle est telle qu'un médecin pourrait s'instruire á cette école.'—*Cours de Littérat. Dram.* vol. ii. p. 379.

I prefer the French translation for two reasons—because it is that by which alone the author consents to be judged; and that there is a hardness in the English translation, and, from keeping too literally to the German arrangement, an obscurity as to the meaning, which is never observable in its Gallic rival.

retains its power over the limbs, but possesses scarcely any over the body, excepting those particular members of it which are employed in walking.'[1] A larger reign must be allowed to the fancy, however, if the actions of gathering and eating grapes, or climbing trees, or composing exercises for the school, can be performed, 'yet all this while in a most fast sleep.'

Although the general effect of Mrs. Siddons was what I have stated, one idle cavil crept out against her manner in this noble scene. People cant about originality, and yet dote upon precedent. 'When she sets down the candle, who does not perceive she varies from her predecessors, only that her hands may be more at liberty to imitate the process of ablution?' That her hands are more at liberty for all purposes by setting down the light will be readily conceded; but here the waking process must be followed, and who, bearing a taper from one apartment to another, does not set it upon a table when the room contains one? Who about to wash the hands retains anything in them? The critic was too purblind to perceive that the real trick was in retaining the light to show unconsciousness of what the sleeper was doing—whereas all the habits of life are by the somnambulist done mechanically.

The quantity of white drapery in which the actress was enveloped had a singular and striking effect—her person, more truly than that of Pierre, might be said to be 'lovelily dreadful,' but extremely majestic both in form and motion—it was, however, the majesty of the tomb; or, as Shakespeare in a previous scene expresses it—

> 'As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites,
> To countenance this horror.'

Perhaps her friend, Sir Joshua Reynolds, might have suggested the almost shroud-like clothing of this important scene. I saw him on this occasion in the orchestra, with great pleasure, sitting 'all gaze, all wonder.' She was in truth so strongly articulate that I have no doubt he heard every syllable that breath made up, for she hardly allowed the voice any portion of its power.

[1] *Elem. of the Philos. of Mind*, p. 347, ed. 1802.

There is a mezzotinto print in existence of Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard in the scene after the murder of Duncan. The ridiculous (not because inaccurate, but because unpicturesque) costume of Garrick does all that dress can do to defeat the startling terrors of his countenance; but the Queen is a kind of angry Hecate, rather than Lady Macbeth, and, however terrible, was much lower in the scale of being than her sublime successor. It is difficult to imagine how such a consummate artist as Garrick could play Gloucester, Richard the Third, who lived in the year 1480, in what is called a shape, and yet act Macbeth, who I think murdered Duncan 440 years earlier, in a general's uniform of the reign of George the Second. However, the fact is unquestionable, and he so acted it all his life.

I will not, at this distance from the performance, endeavour to describe the Macbeth of Smith. In its outline I suppose him to have given what he remembered of Garrick;—he walked the character, but, though much in earnest, he never looked it. The perpetual strain upon his features reminds me of an absurd reading in this very part; and the multitudinous passions, in his expression of them, at the wafting of his hand, became incarnardine, or as Murphy would say—one red. How so sensible a man as Smith certainly was could endure the heavy monotony of his tragic utterance, with all the variety of nature by his side, would surprise, if any self-delusion could surprise, one acquainted with human nature. A great actor, who spoke in a key much higher than any performer existing who speaks at all, told me once seriously that his voice was a deep bass.

With one comprehensive remark of the learned German author whom I have already quoted I shall close all that Macbeth has suggested to me. 'Rien n'est comparable à la puissance de ce tableau pour exciter la terreur. On frissonne en se rappelant le meurtre de Duncan, le simulacre de poignard qui voltige devant les yeux de Macbeth, l'apparition de Banco pendant le repas, l'arrivée nocturne de Lady Macbeth endormie. De pareilles scènes sont uniques. Shakespeare seul en a pu concevoir l'idée, et si elles se présentaient plus souvent sur la scène, il faudrait

mettre la tête de Méduse au nombre des attributs de la muse tragique.'

'In the excitement to terror this picture cannot be equalled. We shudder in recalling the murder of Duncan —the air-drawn dagger which waves before the eyes of Macbeth—the appearance of Banquo at the feast—the night progress of the sleeping Queen. Such scenes stand alone. Shakespeare only can imagine such things, and were they oftener presented on the stage we must place the head of Medusa among the attributes of the tragic muse.'

Their Majesties, in conformity with the gracious design of seeing every performance of Mrs. Siddons, commanded a repetition of *Macbeth* on the 7th of the same month. Tragedy, perhaps, suffers as much as comedy gains by the proximity of royal personages. In sitting to a tragedy they weaken the effect by necessarily dividing the attention of the spectators; their silent admiration inspires nothing to others; but in comedy the royal enjoyment gives a fashion to laughter; the actor does not spare his efforts in the presence of royal patrons, and I believe the late King has led some of the loudest applause that was ever heard in a theatre.

The audiences of this period were sufficiently decorous to be trusted with a scenic display of regal assassination. His Majesty's Government reposed upon the revenue improvement of the Great Minister—and nothing stirred in town but the Westminster scrutiny, which in eight months absolutely struck off 105 bad votes from the poll of Mr. Fox, and 87 from that of Sir Cecil Wray. This gave a reasonable prospect that the whole of the votes might be examined thoroughly and decided fairly in the short compass of two years, the gentlemen of the bar receiving no unusual portion of subtlety, or its synonym, fees. Some little feeling for the unrepresented condition of Westminster warmed our galleries, even in the theatre, at this time; but a speech of Mr. Dundas in the House of Commons, covering Mr. Pitt from a personal attack by Mr. Fox, alone merited the notice of all times.

The character of Lady Macbeth became a sort of exclusive possession to Mrs. Siddons. There was a mystery

about it which she alone seemed to have penetrated. Future and not distant times might supply a better Macbeth. The ingenuity of decoration might add greater truth and reality to the scene, and the choruses might be rendered yet more overpowering by singers more exact and a band more numerous. All this we shall see done. Did it shake at all the supremacy of this great performance? By no means. Looking the other way, did it increase the grandeur or the terror of her first exhibition? Not in the least. With all great efforts of genius, it seemed disdainful alike of help or hindrance—and every audience appeared to wonder why the tragedy proceeded further when at the final exit of the Lady Macbeth its very soul was extracted.

The policy of abstaining so long from the performance of such a character was now apparent, for by what other poetic wonder could it be followed? All other force in female character is comparative feebleness on the English stage. The Greek drama affords us one character which, had Shakespeare studied it in the three great tragedians of that people, and then, preserving Greek manners as ably as he did Roman, written it from his own heart and mind, might have been worthy to succeed the greatest achievement of the stage. The character I mean is Electra, the daughter of Agamemnon, the sister of Orestes.

By what even Voltaire has effected, the dreadful energies of Shakespeare may be half conceived. In the fourth scene of the fourth act of *Oreste* he has something of Shakespearean vigour. The reader will not be sorry to compare on this occasion the dexterous Frenchman with the master-spirit of the drama.

'*Iphise.* Ne vous préparez pas un nouveau repentir.
[*Elle sort.*]
Electre. Un repentir! qui? moi! mes mains désespérées
Dans ce grand abandon seront plus assurées.
Eumenides, venez, soyez ici mes dieux;
Vous connaissez trop bien ces détestables lieux,
Filles de la vengeance, armez-vous, armez-moi,
Venez avec la mort, qui marche avec l'effroi;
Que vos fers, vos flambeaux, vos glaives étincellent;
Oreste, Agamemnon, Electre vous appellent:
Les voici, je les vois, et les vois sans terreur;
L'aspect de mes tyrans m'inspirait plus d'horreur.

Ah! le barbare approche; il vient; ses pas impies
Sont à mes yeux vengeurs entourés des furies,
L'enfer me le désigne, et le livre à mon bras.'

I see here, however different the subject, abundant proof to the critic of poetic feeling (and what is the critic without it?) that Voltaire caught this from the dreadful invocation of Lady Macbeth—

'Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty: make thick my blood,
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th' effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes.'

When I express this opinion, I am fully aware of two addresses of the chorus to the Eumenides, in the *Choephoræ* of Æschylus, and the *Electra* of Sophocles, of which the first is by many degrees the most sublime.

The next character acted by Mrs. Siddons was one intended to serve her brother rather than herself. I allude to her performance of Desdemona in *Othello*, on the 8th of March, 1785; Mr. Kemble acting the noble Moor for the first time in town. The outrageous gallantry of French manners had not, in the time of Shakespeare, rendered the sex more prominent in the drama than it was in real life—affectionate, modest, retiring, firm only to endure and suffer, the females of Shakespeare occupy but little space comparatively with his men. But a great critic, like Warton, might have been expected to discern the superior delicacy with which our great poet has invested what I even now consider to be the loveliest portraits of the lovely sex. Imogen, and Juliet, and Desdemona, and Viola, and the sweet and inexperienced Miranda, are all sisters in the firm allegiance of their affections to the favoured object. But there is not one particle of the vulgar trumpery of stage heroism about them,

Brabantio, the father of Desdemona, is clearly no philosopher. He argues very perversely from his daughter's qualities. Hear him describe her:—

> 'A maiden never bold;
> Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
> Blush'd at herself.'

Surely such a spirit might of all spirits be expected to devour in silence the narrative of an exalted courage—to love him for the dangers he has passed, and think a noble nature superior to all accidents of 'clime, complexion, and degree.' The Doge, or Duke, as he is called, seems to be worthy of his elevation—he has a learned spirit of human dealing, and is so far from thinking Othello a practiser of arts inhibited and out of warrant that, having heard his story with the ears of gravity and age, he exclaims, with goodness equal to his sagacity—

> 'I think this tale would win my daughter too.'

When I say that such a part was little calculated to serve Mrs. Siddons, I look to the gross estimate of the vulgar. Yet one advantage it possessed even with them—it was in the fullest contrast with the character in which she last appeared. It called upon them to observe whether the same great powers of art were not as faithful expositors of all the gentle, and I will say native, properties of the sex as of those fierce and unnatural perversions, the growth of immeasurable ambition.

The exhibition afforded a strong proof of the plastic power of the mind. Its operation here absolutely seemed to lower the figure of the lovely being which had been so towering in Euphrasia, or terrific in Lady Macbeth.

There is one thing about a character written by Shakespeare in his full force, greatly in favour of its impression, I mean those stores of gorgeous phrases which really enrich the mouth from which they proceed. If an actress have or soul or sense, a tongue capable of music or a form susceptible of grace, what may she not effect with passages like the following address of Desdemona to her father?

> 'You are the lord of duty;
> I am hitherto your daughter.'

I may observe incidentally, in support of the legal employment of our great poet's youth, the close of the present speech, so inimitably given by Mrs. Siddons—

> 'And so much duty as my mother show'd
> To you, preferring you before her father,
> So much I challenge that I may profess
> Due to the Moor, my lord.'

Queen Katharine, in our author's *Henry VIII.*, uses the same term in regard to Wolsey:—

> 'And make my challenge.'

I was greatly delighted with the generous warmth that animated the supplication of Desdemona to go with Othello to the wars—

> 'My heart's subdu'd
> Even to the very quality of my lord.'

Mr. Whiter might have found here a support to his ingenious theory, if it wanted one; for Desdemona, touching the military quality of her lord, uses a metaphor drawn from his profession—

> 'My downright violence and storm of fortunes
> May trumpet to the world.'

I agree with that pleasing and learned writer, that this consonance of the figure might drop unconsciously from the poet. Such is the sure though unfelt operation of the associating principle in our ideas.

The elegant deportment, cordial manners, and smothered anxiety, on the landing at Cyprus previous to the arrival of Othello, exhibited a Desdemona which would have enchanted Shakespeare himself, who could so beautifully conceive what his own stage most assuredly never displayed.

Through the jealous scenes of this play I shall excuse myself from passing, by merely remarking that wherever they show the fair victim on the stage, the skill of our perfect actress produced the most intense sympathy. She was then acting on a stage where, if her eye had ever magical power, it then displayed it. How much I regretted the barbarous mutilation of the exquisitely natural scene

which passes between her and Emilia, the third of the fourth act! The rage of the English for action in its wild impatience throws away a thousand delicate and essential touches of character, which, as they increase our love for the person, augment our sympathy with her fate. The critic can only beg that the play may be read in the volumes of Shakespeare, and the innocent but melancholy effusion of Desdemona noted among the felicities of the poet of nature. I have revisited the stage copy of this play, where it had shrunk from sight in my library—but where, curtailing fiends, is the foreboding direction to Emilia as to certain sheets?

> 'If I do die before thee, prythee, shroud me
> In one of those same sheets.'

The recollection of her mother's maid, poor Barbara? The song of 'Willow'—

> 'An old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune,
> And she died singing it: that song to-night
> Will not go from my mind,' etc.

The wandering away from Barbara, to notice delicately the 'proper person' of Lodovico. The return to the 'silly sooth' of the willow, and as quite unavoidable, singing in dirge-like strains immediately before her death. The interruption to the strain—'Hark! who is it that knocks?'

> '*Emil.* It is the wind.'

Her question as to the possibility of being false to wedlock. No hint of one of these things to be found in a copy of Shakespeare's *Othello*, as acted at a theatre royal in an age called enlightened, is an argument for the transfer of such an epithet to the glorious period when such writing was felt to be natural and interesting, and therefore suited to the stage of our plain but intelligent ancestors.

On the last day of the month, Mr. Kemble was permitted to play Macbeth for his own benefit. We had now, therefore, a Glamis who could respond to the alarming incentives of the lady; and an early indication of the effect of such intelligence was the manner of his saying at their meeting, in reference to the going of Duncan—

'To-morrow—as he purposes.'

Kemble appeared to shrink from the quick glance which his sister turned upon him. Though his hopes had depraved his imagination, he seemed unprepared then for the maxim 'be it thought and done,' implied in her instant determination—

'O never shall sun that morrow see.'

Her acting throughout, on this occasion, was of the very highest quality. And here let me state, without undertaking absolutely to account for it, a fact peculiar, as far as I know, to Mrs. Siddons—I mean the very slight inequality in her numerous performances of the same character. In her brother's acting it might be truly observed that very frequently he was utterly below himself. He was cold and formal, paraded his person and his dress, and would walk the character about, as if teaching how it should move through the business and logically pronounce its sentiments. In his sister I never saw anything like this: it must have happened to her, as to every other being engaged in the concerns of life, to feel depressed by care, or absent by the rumination over probable occurrences. But on the stage, I never felt the least indication that she had a private existence, or could be anything but the assumed character. An argument, I should think, of a very powerful imagination.

A friend of mine, to whom upon most occasions I should gladly defer, thinks that 'she was so various in her art as hardly to act the same character twice alike.' I am much more inclined to say she was so profound in her art that her judgment settled once and for ever all the great points of the character; and not changing her view of what she had to convey, there was little difference to be detected that did not arise from noise among what should have been audience, or the occasional assaults of personal indisposition. Indeed, how should the conception remain and the execution differ? or what is the judgment which is in frequent mutation? Firmness of thought is the parent of all vigorous action and utterance.

The delicacy of Mason's *Elfrida*, as it had been much admired in the closet at Buckingham House, begot very

naturally a wish to see the great Preceptress represent the heroine of that drama upon the stage; and on the 14th of April she acted it for the first time by command of their Majesties. The interest of this piece is in the resentment of a royal lover for being by a favoured servant deceived as to the personal graces of Elfrida, whom he makes his own wife, instead of opening a way to the throne for the ambition of her family. The King, by a sudden visit, ascertains the falsehood of Athelwold in the beauties of Elfrida; and, affecting the generous, forgives the treachery of his subject, but demands satisfaction from his rival as man to man; in other words securely assassinates him, for, if the acknowledged guilt of Athelwold 'did not sink him,' how was he to bend his sword against his great master, without feeling himself a traitor? He, therefore, permits his Majesty's weapon to find a ready sheath in his bosom, and leaves his widow to the solemn devotion of herself to the cloister.

As the performance of a character not essentially dramatic, and written rather in imitation of the measured splendour of the Masque at Ludlow Castle than the freedom and vigour of Shakespeare, could display merely the beauty and the milder graces of the actress, as it does not stand strongly discriminated in my memory by more than a few speeches in a single scene, I do not in this place feel myself disposed to go further into it. The effect was heavy, for the dialogue is diffuse and the fable thin. This may also be said of the Greek models from which it was constructed; but as we can but ill conceive the way in which the choruses of antiquity were rendered delightful, even when they do carry on the interest of the play—so on our stages no attempt whatever can be made but to arrange a line of vestals, or of soldiers, or of priests—all uninformed, vulgar, awkward and undisciplined; who affect no feeling while they are stationary, file to the right or the left, as they are led by the fugle lady or gentleman, endure the curses, 'not loud but deep,' of the musicians in the orchestra, and only swell the score of the composer, for the most part out of harmony, and never in time.

On the same day that Mr. Mason's *Elfrida* received the

honour of a royal command and the impersonation of Mrs. Siddons, he was deprived, by a gentle but sudden death, of an amiable friend and very pleasing poet, in the person of Mr. William Whitehead, who, in the seventieth year of his age, expired without a groan at his residence in Charles Street, Grosvenor Square. He had on the 14th of April, 1785, sat down to table, but finding no appetite to his food, he rose, and took his servant's arm in the way to his chamber. In the action he died. He had been subject to difficulty of breathing and palpitations of the heart; the grand organ of vitality grew powerless in one moment, and a mild and virtuous existence closed without a struggle.

Our business with him here is as a dramatic writer, who in one character, that of Horatius in *The Roman Father*, supplied, first to Mr. Garrick, and then to Mr. Henderson, the means of very powerful impression upon the stage. Mr. Mason, in describing the modest conduct of Mr. Whitehead, and his almost actor-like love of quick and striking effects in the scene, has given us a valuable opinion as to Mr. Garrick himself, which the reader will apply beyond perhaps the object of its writer:—

'Mr. Whitehead wrote with a view to scenical effect only; and, indeed, if he had done otherwise, his then virgin Muse would scarcely have been so favourably received as she was by Mr. Garrick, who, at that time, in the meridian of his fame as an actor, and of his power as a manager, was sufficiently despotic to refuse admission upon the stage to any performance in which he could not display his principal and almost unrivalled merits, the expression of strong but sudden effects of passion; for, conscious of his peculiar strength, he was rather pleased to elevate, by his own theatrical powers, feeble diction and sentiment, than to express that in which the poet might be naturally supposed to have a share in the applause. And so much persuaded am I of his foible in this point, that I believe, had Shakespeare been alive, and had produced his *Hamlet* to Mr. Garrick, precisely in the same circumstances that Mr. Whitehead did the tragedy in question, few soliloquies (which when he acted the *Hamlet* of a dead Shakespeare he was obliged to retain) would have been admitted by him

without the most licentious pruning. For though no man did more to correct the vicious taste of the preceding age in theatrical declamation than he did, so far, indeed, as to change the mode almost entirely, yet this was not his principal excellence, and he knew it; and therefore disliked to perform any part whatever where expression of countenance was not more necessary than recitation of sentiment.' —*Memoirs*, p. 63 *seq.*

'Opinionum commenta delet dies, naturæ judicia confirmat.'[1] Nothing can be more certain than the judgment above cited in relation to Garrick. The residence of Mr. Mason was so far from town, that he probably never knew the actual tradings of Garrick with the soliloquies of Hamlet. But he was borne out to the very letter of his criticism. There is a very admirable specimen of audible thinking in the fourth scene of the fourth act of *Hamlet*; and very probably the passage most essential to the true development of Hamlet's mysterious character is the following:—

'Now, whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple,
Of thinking too precisely on the event,' etc.
* * * *
'Rightly to be great,
Is—not to stir without great argument;
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour 's at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep?'

He then considers the imminent death of at least twenty thousand men, who for a mere trick of fame go to their graves as unconcernedly as they would retire to their beds; and, for the present at least, Hamlet himself determines upon vigorous action—

'O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!'

As, however necessary, this soliloquy still continues unknown to the common audiences, I have been obliged to

[1] *Cicero de Nat. Deorum.* l. 2.

quote some part at least of so fine a composition, which one might have thought the most urgent actor would have found rather spirit-stirring and effective; but no, Mr. Garrick himself wrote the rhapsody which he chose to utter, in spite of Nature and Shakespeare:—

> 'Awake my soul, awake!
> Wake nature, manhood, vengeance, rouse at once!
> My father's spirit calls. The hour is come!
> From this time forth, my thoughts be bloody all.
> I'll fly my keepers—sweep to my revenge.'

It is delightful to him who reviews the progress of an actress to observe the striking contrast afforded by the female supports of the scene. The theatrical lord conceives himself paramount over both nature and art; the justest thoughts must give way to his personal exhibition; the finest poetry must be measured by his organ; whether the poet's design be understood or not is of slight moment where his own display is at stake; nay, even the movement of a few painted rags must supersede the just continuity of the action. When we look to his female partner of the scene, how different is the conduct! Did Mrs. Porter, or Mrs. Pritchard, or Mrs. Siddons ever re-write the scenes of Lady Macbeth? What did the best of them require of a character given to their study? 'That it should be written in Nature'—they were then satisfied that their talent could do the rest; and, relying upon their author, only strove to be worthy representatives of his genius. In some few instances they may have done more; when, like Mrs. Barry, they inspired a writer's Muse as well as his passion; and the divine Monimia and Belvidera but echoed the feelings with which poor Otway's fancy endowed their fascinating model.

The Rosalind of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* had been a favourite character of Mrs. Siddons on theatres nearer to his Forest of Arden; and for her second benefit this season she ventured to appear upon the London stage in a dress which more strongly reminded the spectator of the sex which she had laid down than that which she had taken up. Even this, which showed the struggle of modesty to

save all unnecessary exposure, was a thousand times more captivating as to female loveliness than the studious display of all that must have rendered concealment impossible. At present the ladies on our stages take dress as a matter merely indifferent, and appear by troops in male attire.

The longing of every good mind must be after the simplicity and virtue of rural, but not vulgar scenes; elegant but unaffected, where the head is always corrected by the heart, and the heart itself fashioned by the surrounding beauties of Nature; where the trees of the forest possess the gift of tongues, and running brooks are as volumes which murmur wisdom to the studious—

> 'Vain wish! those days were never; airy dreams
> Sat for the picture; and the poet's hand,
> Imparting substance to an empty shade,
> Impos'd a gay delirium for a truth.'

Yet something like this, it is implied in our great poet's work, the forest magic may still yield to such as seek its shades from the avowed treachery and cruelty of the populous city. Alas! he says no more than that the persecuted virtues of life, endeared by sympathy to each other, may exist in inaccessible deserts without 'sin or blame,' and find humanity wounded by even the necessary sacrifice of its velvet friends.

But the truth is that Shakespeare, the interpreter of Nature, corrects the poet's day-dream even when he relates it. Orlando himself, a persecuted fugitive, almost reverses the picture which the Duke had been drawing of an earthly paradise, in which the creeping hours were lost as well as neglected under the shade of melancholy boughs, by men who admit that they had seen better days, enjoyed the comforts of worthy hospitality and the regulated consolations of religion.

Rosalind was one of the most delicate achievements of Mrs. Siddons. The common objection to her comedy, that it was only the smile of tragedy, made the express charm of Rosalind—her vivacity is understanding, not buoyant spirits—she closes her brilliant assaults upon others with a smothered sigh for her own condition. She often appears to my recollection addressing the successful Orlando by the

beautiful discrimination of Shakespeare's feelings. 'Orlando' had been familiar, 'young man' now coarse:—

> 'Gentleman,
> Wear this for me; one out of suits with fortune;
> That could give more, but that her hand lacks means.
> Shall we go, coz?'

Again:—

> He calls us back: my pride fell with my fortunes.'

And, on the discovery that modesty kept even his encouraged merit silent, the graceful farewell faintly articulated was such a style of comedy as could only come from a spirit tenderly touched. The flight to the Forest of Arden, which the great Shakespearean Schlegel seems to have taken for the Ardennes, extending from Thionville to the frontiers of Champagne, and in the time of the Romans a forest of immense extent, exhibits the lovely Rosalind in male attire, accompanied by her more than sister cousin Celia. Like a stricken deer, she comes into retirement to languish of a wound for which activity is the only cure; but her lover is driven to the same retreat, and, as the very eloquent foreigner just named has observed, she finds that Love is despotic lord of the whole forest. 'He teaches his lore to the simple rustic as well as to the cultivated courtier'; to him whose wisdom only apprehends that 'the more one sickens the worse at ease he is,' and him whose very refinement leads him to render his verse continual incentives to his passion.

Rosalind is quickly aware that her preference is returned by Orlando; and, therefore, having sought a settled low content, in a sheep-cote fenced about with olive-trees, leading to which is a rank of osiers bending over a stream that murmurs to the melancholy rustling of their branches, she soon in her disguise ventures to give her powers of wit free scope; and, instead of feeling impatience, is disposed to await the favourable issue of those events which seem to have arranged themselves. Mrs. Siddons put so much soul into all the raillery of Ganymede as really to cover the very boards of the stage. She seemed indeed brought up by a deep magician, and to be forest-born. But the return to

the habiliments of Rosalind was attended with that happy supplement to the poet's language, where the same terms are applied to different personages, and the meaning is expanded by the discrimination of look and tone and action—

'To you I give myself, for I am yours.'

I believe it has not been remarked with what exquisite propriety the poet has made the usurping Duke punish with the greatest severity a kindred crime committed by Oliver against his brother Orlando. We never approve villainy, though we commit it; and always cover it with some mask, as if it originated less in our passions than in some uncontrollable necessity. Man was made for virtue.

A doubt has frequently arisen how far plays of a character so imaginative are suited to a theatre. Perhaps no very clear solution can be given. *As You Like It* has never been a very powerful magnet, yet it has never been without its attraction. I know not that Rosalind has suffered much, acted by either Mrs. Crawford, Miss Younge, or Mrs. Siddons. The roynish clown, Touchstone, also seemed to me perfectly suited to the manner of King. The part of Jaques is rather the shadow of a great humorist than 'the true and perfect image of life indeed.' He is a mere indifferent spectator among the children of earth—he takes no part with or against any man—his account with the world is closed, and he is only solicitous to indulge his spleen. Of this character my friend Henderson seemed, in the poet's phrase, to have 'sucked the melancholy,' and left to his successors three fine set speeches to utter with good emphasis and good discretion—no more.

This was a season of great exertion to our charming actress, who absolutely acted seventy-one times. The quicksilver in the treasury, or, without a figure, the number of repetitions ordered of each play, will show their comparative attraction. But we should place in the foreground the novelties now introduced into her list of characters:—

Margaret of Anjou (*Earl of Warwick*)	3 times
Zara (in *Zara*)	2 „
Countess of St. Vallori (*Carmelite*)	12 „
Camiola (*Maid of Honour*)	3 „

Lady Macbeth (2nd of February to the 10th of May) .	13 times
Desdemona	5 „
Elfrida (Mason's *Elfrida*)	2 „
Rosalind (at the season's close)	4 „

CHARACTERS OF HER FORMER SEASONS

Mrs. Beverley	5 „
Lady Randolph	3 „
Isabella	3 „
Euphrasia	4 „
Jane Shore	2 „
Calista	1 „
Belvidera	4 „
Zara	3 „
Sigismunda	2 „
	71 times

The list which is before us claims a few remarks. Dr. Franklin, and Aaron Hill, and Mason, and even Massinger, came and passed away like shadows, however informed with the pathos or the reason or the grandeur of the actress.

Cumberland had combined, along with Mrs. Siddons, Smith, Palmer, and Kemble; and a quite new tragedy, that did not look very unlike an old one, was repeated during the season twelve times, and gave its melancholy interest to very respectable audiences. But it was reserved for Shakespeare's prodigy of woman, Lady Macbeth, to be repeated thirteen times, and become, for the remainder of the actress's life, the most powerful of all her attractions.

Of the early characters, the lowest in the scale was Calista, a part of great force, and acted by Mrs. Siddons with even transcendent effect. The play, too, possessing one of those scenes of altercation which are the delight of our taste, and a bier and the slain Lothario to amuse the gaping vulgar.

CHAPTER XVI

THE preceding chapter will have demonstrated the prodigious attraction of Mrs. Siddons. For three seasons together she had delighted the town by the repetition of a limited number of our tragedies, of which, to say the truth, she was not only the first, but the sole moving principle. It should also be remembered, not in the estimate of her attraction, but her utility, that all her success had been attended with no expense to the theatre. Scenery, dress, decoration of every kind were reserved for Christmas prodigalities; and the legitimate drama in those days, it was thought, might be kept alive by the pathos or the humour of the performer. The comic strength of the Drury Lane company was unquestionably at this time as complete and perfect a force as could be formed by skill, or kept together by kindness; but the great receipts of the season were constantly numbered by the nights of Mrs. Siddons and tragedy.

When so much is thus attributed to Mrs. Siddons, it should be stated that the time was not arrived to give her the best aid of her brother, Mr. Kemble. That great actor had appeared when the fires of a proud idolatry blazed brightly upon the altars erected to the genius of Garrick; he had to make way for a style of acting essentially original, striking, and learned, but bearing the marks of labour too sensibly in its early exertions. Smith held the first rank in the theatre, and, having a host of powerful friends, retained, even in tragedy, every character which he had been accustomed to play. In the lovers of tragedy Brereton, by much bustle, and a greater show of emotion, was commonly thought no mean successor of the persuasive Barry. The very studies of Kemble were objected to him as defects,

and even a scholar could assail him in diurnal trash like the following:—

'As to Mr. Kemble, he has so much knowledge, we are afraid to encounter him; but if we, in our ignorance, may offer him a little advice, it would be that he should pack up all his learning, his superior judgment, his punctuations, his quips and his quiddities, his gesticulations and his graceful attitudes, and fairly trundle them off the boards of old Drury; and if he can pick up in lieu of them a little nature, we will venture to assert it will not be the worse for him.

'Brereton recovers his health, and will recover his acting; but he must not relax his attention against the powers that would devour him.'

This generous fable was signed 'Esop.'

The few plays of Mrs. Siddons's first season had now, however, sensibly abated of their attraction. Not from any doubt of their excellence, but from their almost endless repetition. The English are slaves only to novelty. With us there is little of that salutary prejudice in favour of the classics of the country that keeps a national theatre devoted to the performance of its *chefs-d'œuvre*, and admits with the greatest caution any accessions to the established repertory. It is in Paris only that we find this grand predilection encouraged in every possible way, and the Government itself supplying funds to raise, renew, and perpetuate the literary glories of the stage.

A commercial speculation must be profitable, or it must close. In the hands of adventurers Shadwell may be of more value than Shakespeare. It is a compliment to which all managers are not entitled, that they would prefer the poet to the buffoon, if the one were even as profitable as the other. Give the usurper the ascendency as to attraction and the reign of genius is at an end. What then can bring about his restoration? Nothing but the accident of talent congenial with his own, which must find adequate materials for the display of its proper powers. The poet revives in the player. I cannot talk of dividing the laurels of Shakespeare even with Garrick; they are not to be divided; they sprung up by the side of his cradle, and

spread in endless luxuriance around his tomb. The student of his immortal labours knows how imperfect the greatest efforts of the actor will always be to unfold the amazing subtilty of his conceptions. The hurry of public utterance, the casual interruptions among a vast crowd of spectators, the failure of the ear itself, all forbid even the full enjoyment of the power which he has; shades of meaning have an exility that baffles the nicest articulation, the finest eye.

The bulk of mankind have neither leisure nor faculties for very accurate study; they must be content with the interpretations of actors, not the most attentive readers of poetry, nor even very minute observers of life itself; they must take the prescriptive manner of the profession, the habit of doing what had been done before; the show of thought rather than thinking; the mimicry of emotion, not very scrupulous as to its source or its effects; a look that merely bespeaks our sympathy; a tone that long experience has demonstrated to be the note of sorrow, and affecting us independent of particular ideas.

A genius in acting must, however, be a profound observer of life. He secretly revolves all the folds of his own heart; he mixes much abroad with the world of character, and all its indications are set down in his 'tablets' as the materials with which he is to work. The poet's science is how man thinks and feels in all the relative conditions of his nature: the actor's how he speaks, and looks, and moves. The inward and the outward man may be the best as well as briefest indications of their different provinces. When the author is himself an actor (an immense advantage, *ceteris paribus*), he will sometimes trace out both, and display not only what is to do, but how it is to be done.

'*Macb.* I have almost forgot the taste of fears:
The time has been my senses would have cool'd
To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir
As life were in 't: I have supp'd full with horrors;
Direness, familiar to my slaught'rous thoughts,
Cannot once start me. Wherefore was that cry?
Sey. The queen, my lord, is dead.
Macb. She should have died hereafter.'

If the reader ever saw anything like this frigid despair

upon the stage, the remembrance of original nature in the death of all her living signs, the bearing about in our anatomy this petrifaction of the heart, he has seen what it has not been my fortune to behold. The actors all mimic the lost emotions, and show Macbeth mistaken.

Such hints are few even among our early writers. When, therefore, the great actor has fully imbibed the poet's design, he then reverts to the stores of his own observation, and accidents in real life become lessons which enable him to throw the truth of imitation upon the character which is under his study. Garrick's Lear is no doubt truly said to have benefited by the dreadful spectacle of a father who let his child escape from his arms while fondling it at an open window. He became fixed in a distraction which perpetually beheld the accident renewed, and displayed for ever the original agonies of the father. The reader will see the places in which it suggested to the greatest of actors the recurrences, so frequent in Lear, to the cruelty of his daughters.

Such studies are absolutely essential to the actor, for whom the closet alone will do little. Without this actual experience of life he will certainly be unfaithful to the poet, and deliver his text in the usual style of meagre declamation. Where does the painter study expression, in the historian or the poet? O, no; his eye is everywhere; he is the undetected spy upon his species, and watches for it unsophisticated and unprepared. Countenances are made up, manners are the children of discipline. Nature dressed is art, and clumsy art, until use has polished it into a second nature; a peasant child, alone, playing upon a bank of flowers, may be a model of the graceful and the expressive. Sir Joshua Reynolds used to shudder at the notion of a little miss before her dancing-master. I have seen in Mrs. Siddons hundreds of touches caught by herself from the real world—

> 'She is a great observer, and she looks
> Quite through the deeds of men.

It is commonly deemed no slight ordeal to have her steady gaze bent upon you, as she sits, too willingly, silent a long time in society. Nor is this the result of prudence

or reserve, for she has a sound understanding, and is well read—it is choice: to observe is her mental discipline.

I had, I was going to say, gratified myself in this display of the stores which supply the great effects of art, when I was suddenly alarmed by the following passage, which I read in Warburton's works—it is in the admirable dedication of the D. L. to the Free Thinkers: 'Urceus, surnamed Codrus, being asked why he mixed so much buffoonery in his works, replied that Nature had formed mankind in such a manner as to be most taken with buffoons and story-tellers.' How stand I then in attempting to win a story-telling age to the description of a great intellectual charm, and the means by which it was accomplished? I must, like others, be contented with the approbation of those who reflect, till a glut of nonsense may make sober efforts like mine to analyse our best enjoyments desirable even as novelty.

To proceed, I must observe that comedy, however it had aided the general services of the theatre, could not be said, even with the help of opera, to be fully equal to the single attraction of Mrs. Siddons. Miss Farren was greatly admired; but her name put up in the most attractive comedy of Congreve, or Cibber, or Vanbrugh, or the more modern attractions of Murphy, Sheridan, or Cumberland, could not boast of that string of exalted visitors who followed in the train of the serious Muse. The management of King, as it was natural it should, leant to the side of his own attraction, and very perfect indeed was comedy, as acted by himself, and Smith, and Palmer, and Bensley, with the broader forces of Parsons, Moody, Suett, Dodd, Baddeley, and the younger Bannister—to which may be added the steady and unfailing charm of Miss Pope, the delightful pupil and successor of Clive. But, however powerful this force might be together, there seemed no chance that any single name in comedy should ever, as to fashionable life, divide the town with Mrs. Siddons; when even that alarming trial of her stability was afforded by a young unpatronised actress in the York company. The reader sees that I can only allude to Mrs. Jordan. Certainly no lady in my time was ever so decidedly marked out for

comic delight. She seemed as if expressly formed to dry up the tears which tragedy had so long excited, and balance the account between the dramatic sisters, which Garrick alone entirely succeeded to do in his own single person. For although his friend Johnson preferred his comedy, yet his Lear stood unapproached in the records of tragic excellence.

The mark of this great actress had been made upon all the little caresses of female artifice that inspire confidence because they presume ingenuousness; all those sportive enjoyments of bounding youth and whim and eccentricity; things that are usually done laughing, and provoke the laugh of unavoidable sympathy. Her sphere of observation had for the most part been in the country, and *The Country Girl*, therefore, became her own, in its innocence or its wantonness, its moodiness under restraint, or its elastic movement when free. Her imagination teemed with the notions of such a being, and the gestures with which what she said was accompanied spoke a language infinitely more expressive than words—the latter could give no more than the meaning of her mind, the former interpreted for the whole being. She did not rise to the point where comedy attains the dignity of moral satire, but humour was her own in all its boundless diversity.

She had no reserve whatever of modest shyness to prevent her from giving the fullest effect to the flights of her fancy. She drove everything home to the mark, and the visible enjoyment of her own power added sensibly to its effects upon others. Of her beautiful compact figure she had the most captivating use; its spring, its wild activity, its quickness of turn. She made a grand deposit of her tucker, and her bosom concealed everything but its own charms. The redundant curls of her hair, half showing and half concealing the archness of her physiognomy, added to a playfulness which, even as she advanced in life, could not seem otherwise than natural and delightful. But all this would have been inadequate to her pre-eminence without that bewitching voice which blurted out the tones of vulgar enjoyment, or spleen, or resistance, so as to render even coarseness pleasing, or flowed in the sprightly measures of a joy so exhilarating

as to dispel dulness in an instant: she crowned all this by a laugh so rich and so provoking, an expression of face so brilliant, and that seemed never to tire in giving pleasure, that the sight of her was a general signal for the most unrestrained delight.

We know that all this was but the imitation of a reality —her delight must have been, not in the part, but its success —it could at most amuse her, and the twentieth repetition of the best written character must be matter of business, and serious business too; yet there was no languor to betray the constraint of a prescribed task; her vivacity always charactered as fresh sparkling truth, and even life itself seemed hardly to be so natural as her representations.

Nor did her powers as an actress stop here; for though the accomplished woman of fashion was not within her reach, and the heroine of tragedy was a mere day-dream of her youth never to be realised, yet there was a power of tenderness about her all but equal to her hilarity. I cannot say that the exterior indicated much sensibility (I use the term in its restricted sense); the charm was in an organ of amazing sweetness, which, when, as in Viola, it found a passage musically constructed, poured it upon the ear in a strain of singular melody. As to what may be called the grammatical analysis of a passage, by which the construction of it is forcibly marked, the clauses well detached from each other, and yet the whole meaning bound together, there was no effort of the sort; the words streamed on from the beginning to the close: it was a land 'flowing with milk and honey,' and neither had nor appeared to need the cultivation of art. But delightful as her voice was in speaking, it showed its quality with rather increase of effect when, as she frequently did, she introduced any ballad story, serious or comic, to a common air, unaccompanied by the band. The effect of these voluntaries cannot be described, nor did I ever hear anything like them. She would begin often in one key and end in another; but every key to her unlocked the avenue to the heart.

I would not slightly pass over such a charmer as Mrs. Jordan in these *Memoirs of Mrs. Siddons.* I have chosen to recall the memory of the only rival she could have in the

profession purposely. That is not first-rate excellence which needs any caution as to its display. The human heart is so framed that the person whose attraction approaches to our own cannot be dear to us; and the ill-judging partisans of either lady used, I remember, to undervalue the other. The cry of one party was 'Where is Nature?' of the other 'Surely she is vulgar.'

The answer to this sorry stuff was, that the speaking of Mrs. Siddons was the proper delivery of such a composition as tragedy written in verse, and that Mrs. Jordan's utterance was suited to the level of the characters which she performed, without the slightest tinge of fashionable affectation. The dispute was about the prize, public favour, which they equally merited, though on different grounds; and the portion of the one actress conferred rather more respect than that of the other. In the meantime the accession of this new charm might have been thought to secure the fortune of the theatre so highly gifted; and this it unquestionably would have done under any other man than Mr. Sheridan. I am not going to add to the vast mass of his irregularities by a childish love for his talents converted almost into a monument to his honour. One would really conceive, from some late narratives, that the first of all merits was 'the art of using the property of others—a plausibility that nothing could resist purveying for need that ought never to have existed.' When I number the persons connected with the Drury Lane property who have been ruined by their confidence in their matchless chief; when I see the enormous treasure dissipated, no man could ever guess how, and perceive this great mistaken man himself, for the most part, living at the table of others, I have a problem before me which all my knowledge of him cannot solve, and an indignation is excited which all my respect for him cannot stifle.

Sheridan seemed decidedly adverse to innovation in the management of his theatre—for the most part he followed that of Mr. Garrick in all but the restless, unappeasable solicitude without which such a concern can never long succeed. *The Jubilee* was now revived, with what they at that time called splendour, and one grace it had, which no

time will ever surpass—Mrs. Siddons drawn in state as the Muse of Tragedy, and, as well as mere mechanism and motion could compensate the want of background, resembling Sir Joshua Reynolds's sublime portrait of her. But Jordan was not the Comic Muse of the show, but a tall, lifeless woman, whose name was Cuyler, exceedingly pallid, and whose features were ridiculously small for her size. The whole of the company were employed in the long procession of Shakespeare's characters, and the London elements were more propitious than those of Stratford proved to this effort of Garrick to do honour to his great master. This incidental allusion to the Jubilee at Stratford may perhaps sanction what follows upon that much-contested subject.

The more I consider the matter, the more I feel disposed to admit the propriety of that celebration of our great poet called the Stratford Jubilee. The time of it was not so strictly appropriate. The year 1769 commemorated nothing that related to Shakespeare. Five years sooner would have been a bicentenary from his birth—three years earlier would have been distant a century and a half from his death. Nor was the month of this festival chosen more happily than the year. Shakespeare was born, and he died, the 23rd of April. The first day of the Jubilee was the 6th of September.

But not to consider such matters 'too curiously,' whether it originated in veneration or vanity, it is an enviable circumstance in Mr. Garrick's life that he projected this tasteful celebration.

> 'For Garrick was a worshipper himself:
> He drew the liturgy, and framed the rites
> And solemn ceremonial of the day,
> And call'd the world to worship on the banks
> Of Avon, fam'd in song. No few return'd
> Doubtless much edified and all refresh'd.'

Two of the commentators upon Shakespeare amused themselves in trying their favourite weapon—ridicule—upon the importance and the poetry of Garrick at Stratford. The most trifling part of the business was that suggested by Dr. Johnson's celebrated line—

> 'Each change of many-coloured life he drew.'

The ribbon-weavers of Coventry were set to work to compose a ribbon to be called the Jubilee ribbon, which should be an emblem of his genius, and reflect all the colours of the rainbow; and this manufacture being recommended by public advertisement, the eyes of the great steward were gratified by the affluence of these Jubilee favours on the persons of the beauty and fashion which attended the celebration.

Warburton thus despatches Garrick's 'Ode to Shakespeare': 'Garrick's portentous ode has but one line of truth in it, which is where he calls Shakespeare the god of our idolatry: for sense I will not allow it; for that which is so highly satirical, he makes the topic of his hero's encomium. The ode itself is below any of Cibber's. Cibber's nonsense was something like sense; but this man's sense, whenever he deviates into it, is much more like nonsense.'

Warburton was now Bishop of Gloucester. His severity as to the poetry of Garrick, because unworthy of the god of our idolatry, is surpassed, as it ought to be, by his reprobation of the vocal charms at a musical festival for the benefit of the distressed clergy of three dioceses. I should rather have blushed at the cause itself than the means of its relief. But the passage is very characteristic.

'We, too, have had our Jubilee; but held in the old Jewish manner, when it was a season for the relief of the distressed, which was truly singing to God with the voice of melody. We, too, and with a vengeance, exalted our singing voice, in the language of old Hopkins and Sternhold, the Cibber and the Garrick of their time for ode-making. But here we forsook our Jewish model. You know that the hire of a whore and the price of a dog were forbid to be offered up to the God of purity. But we presume to offer up to him the hire of two whores. You may judge by what I am going to say what it is that passes under the name of charity amongst us. We have got for the distressed clergy of the three dioceses some £340. And to procure this we have levied upon the country £684, 6s. 10d. for their entertainment in fiddlers and singers; of which sum £100 is contributed by me and my coadjutor.'—Letter, *September* 23, 1769.

The other commentator, Steevens, I believe, tried every way to annoy the actor who had been pronounced the best living commentary upon the poet's works. But when his parody selected Le Stue, the Duke of Newcastle's cook, as the subject of a rival statue and temple, he might be said to dishonour Shakespeare rather than Garrick; and to prove how dangerous it is in these cases, to the satirist himself, to be cursed with more malice than merriment.

The Jubilee at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, contained that procession of the characters of Shakespeare of which the programme had been composed by Garrick for a public progress through the town of Stratford. But the torrents of rain that poured down on the Thursday and Friday rendered so much of the scale of entertainment abortive. The three beautiful witches of the masquerade, Lady Pembroke, Mrs. Bouverie, and Mrs. Crewe, seemed to adhere strictly to the poet's text—

> 'When shall we three meet again,
> In thunder, lightning, or in rain?'

Their power was universally acknowledged.

Although I should be the last certainly to discourage any attempts to honour the genius of Shakespeare, yet I should hardly give my sanction, humble as it is, to a barren erection, such as a temple, for instance, in the unthinking place of his nativity. I would rather use his name to form a provision, not for those who bear it, but, improving on the plan of his fellow comedian Alleyn, to erect a retreat in Stratford itself for a limited number of worthy members of his own profession. The edifice should be, if possible, erected on the site of the New Place; and I would give the tenants of rather a tasteful retirement the pleasure of looking upon the statue of their great poet, placed in the centre of the quadrangle they might inhabit, or in the gardens behind it. The theatrical funds of London might be associated with such a design, and elect to its comforts out of the candidates who should present themselves for Shakespeare College.

The municipal control to be in the Corporation of Stratford for the time being, to avoid the expense of a set of Masters and Fellows—utterly unnecessary to such an institution.

Such a thing as the above, however desirable, I am fully aware will never be done, because it administers only to human comfort, not to personal vanity. How happy would it make me to be compelled to correct my estimate of my own times by seeing such a hint adopted, and a neat and substantial building arise, in which such a man, for instance, as poor Wewitzer was might find a welcome refuge for his age, and a security from the misery of capricious dependence.

It was on the 26th of November that Mrs. Siddons acted the part of Mrs. Lovemore, in Murphy's very pleasing comedy, *The Way to Keep Him*. The bow must not always be kept at its full stretch; our great actress required some relief from the severity of her personal exertion; beside this consideration for her health, some of her Bath admirers had a wish to widen the sphere of her town attraction by the display of the woman rather than the actress; and as she always kindled enthusiasm in those who truly admired her, they conceived that so fine a figure and a speaker so eloquent, moving through the actions of merely polished life in our modern comedies, might bestow a rather unusual charm upon them, and contrast admirably with the sparkling captivations of Miss Farren.

I remember well the effect the two ladies seemed to have upon each other. The Widow Belmour would undoubtedly have been gayer with any other Mrs. Lovemore; and the habit of tragedy is so clinging, that the neglected wife of the wanton masquerader, Lord Etheridge, wore something of the sorrows of Mrs. Beverley in her general aspect. The assumed gaiety of Mrs. Siddons was certainly not comic. There was an insurmountable bar in the way to her imitating the manners of her friendly and enchanting adviser.

The object of *The Way to Keep Him* seems to be to

recommend an impossibility to the practice of the wedded fair—to keep up the attractions which won the lover in order to secure the husband. Perhaps only one of the author's maxims can be with much confidence relied upon, namely, to preserve a studious neatness in the apparel of the wife. But the sphere of duties is totally changed—the accomplishments of the girl are unbecoming the wife, who is probably a mother, certainly the mistress of a household. That the husband should not seek parties abroad, his lady is, it seems, solicitously to assemble parties at home. When the husband changes the gratifying object, it does not appear vastly important where he may find it; besides, that from minds thus facile and frivolous it were quite unreasonable to expect conjugal happiness.

After all, no general rule can embrace the variety of such cases. The new relations adopted by the parties will at last settle upon principle or convenience. The passions of both must be controlled either by reason or necessity. But the really important point is early to regulate the objects of mutual expectation. Life has something of greater importance than either a drawing-room, a concert, a card party, or a ball. Superficial accomplishments soon lose their value in domestic estimate; and we are then compelled to seek our happiness in fidelity and permanent esteem. The great moralist read to his friend Murphy, in a few lines, a lesson of more intrinsic value than even the elegant comedy we are considering. 'Marriage,' says the *Rambler*, 'is the strictest tie of perpetual friendship. There can be no friendship without confidence, and no confidence without integrity: and he must expect to be wretched who pays to beauty, riches, or politeness that regard which only virtue and piety can claim.'—*Rambler*, No. 18, at the close.

I formerly expressed a doubt as to the policy of permitting Mrs. Siddons to descend from the higher sphere of tragedy, and I see no reason now to change that feeling. It will be said, Is not the impression of the actor doubled by his universality? Certainly; absolute risible comedy opposed to tragedy from the same performer may add to his fame, by exciting a pleasing astonishment. It was so when Garrick acted Lear and the Tobacconist—it was so when

Henderson acted Richard the Third, and on the next evening Falstaff. But full and almost violent contrast may be necessary, or the lighter effects will injure the stronger. If *The Country Girl* of Mrs. Siddons could have equalled her *Isabella*, I should with some hesitation, even then, on account of her sex, have said—'Proceed in the track left by Shakespeare and Garrick, and make the world of character your own.' But as her figure and her features could not bear the debasement of ridiculous exhibition, as the most that could be done for the sister empire was to assume some doubtful tenants upon the frontiers, subjects of either Muse by turns, the effect was not strong enough to render the task desirable.

The actress whose mighty powers in tragedy were confessed in the agonies she excited in some, and the tears she drew from all, in Mrs. Lovemore allowed her audience to retire with an expression much too cold for her fame. 'Very well,' is a poor commendation for her exertions. Were it even certainty that no one could act the character better, there would always arise a cruel question for her importance: But what is it to do when done best? But, deserting the Lovemores and the Oakleys and the Sullens and the Stricklands, suppose that, looking to the works of the great bard, we select a character of simplicity and truth, of which the sensibility is the great charm, and there is an utter want of all those ruling actions and passions which rouse and agitate, and thus delight, the general audience. Alas, the fine essence of such characters is too thin for common perception; it will be caught only by a few, and waste its sweetness over the heads of coarse and negligent spectators. The reason of this has been pointed out in the language of an author whom I should injure not to call the most enchanting of all thinkers—Montaigne. 'Nous n'apercevons les grâces que pointues, bouffies, et enflées d'artifice: celles qui coulent sous la naïveté et la simplicité échappent aisément à une vue grossière comme est la nôtre; elles ont une beauté délicate et cachée; il faut la vue nette et bien purgée pourdé couvrir cette secrète lumière.' If, rambling thus in quest of authority, I should lead the reader to the *Essais* of the incomparable Michel de

Montaigne, he may accept a remark which will heighten his satisfaction in their perusal. The admired printer Didot has given the orthography of the author's age. The etymologist will see how much closer the French is brought by it to the primitive language; and the English scholar will be astonished to find the idiom infinitely nearer to his own tongue than the modern French is to the modern English —besides that, Montaigne's French has a grandeur in the choice of terms, and a numerous flow and sweetness in his sentences, partaking of the peculiar charm of the Spanish. The grammarian will be pleased with this view of a great master of language—but every thinker should make De Montaigne one of the friends whom he most visits. But let me bestow far higher praise than this. There is no writer who does so much justice to the virtues of the laborious peasantry as this accomplished scholar; and his picture of the rustics who work upon his estate—'qui ne s'allictent que pour mourir'—has that in it to make philosophy blush at a wisdom and patience and gentleness beyond the reach of its ostentatious pedantry. See his 12th chapter, 3rd book, on 'Physiognomy.'

The stage, on the 25th of November, had a loss which forty years have not repaired—I allude to the death of Henderson—a man of great genius, and possessing the most versatile powers that I have ever witnessed. He becomes associated with Mrs. Siddons, because, in despite of positive ignorance or prejudice in the Drury Lane management, he immediately, on her retreat from town, pronounced her to be the first and best of actresses—to have in herself all that her predecessors possessed, and all that they wanted. I never was so happy as to see these excellent artists perform together. In town they were the ornaments of different theatres. The late King, with that pleasing warmth which was characteristic of him, once said that, 'if he were a theatrical monarch, his two favourites should act upon the same stage.' Even a hint of this nature, one might have expected, would have operated like a command; but it was never attended to. During Henderson's readings from Sterne, I personally witnessed his power over the feelings of Mrs. Siddons; and the

pathetic chapters of *Shandy* excited no few tears from the brightest eyes that I have ever seen. His alternations of humour and tenderness kept her in the situation of her own Cordelia—

> 'You have seen
> Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and tears
> Were like, a better way. Those happy smiles
> That play'd on her ripe lip, seem'd not to know
> What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence
> As pearls from diamonds dropt.'

The loss of such a man, before he had reached the fortieth year of his age, was deeply felt; and Mrs. Siddons, at the proper time, intimated to his representatives that if a benefit was intended for his family they would oblige her by the employment of her talents on that occasion. On the 25th of February, 1786, she spoke a prologue which the pen of his friend Murphy supplied, and showed all 'the glory of her art' in a performance of Belvidera on the stage of Covent Garden Theatre, at that time the more splendid house, and capable of the greater receipt. Mrs. Abington added to the attraction her inimitable Lady Racket. The pit was let at box prices.

On the 4th of March, 1786, *The Distressed Mother* was acted for Mrs. Siddons's benefit, and as she had done in *The Mourning Bride* of Congreve, she took the more vehement character, and performed Hermione. However Phillips may rank as a pastoral poet, I have no hesitation in placing this translation of the *Andromaque* of Racine before any other version from either that poet or Voltaire. The *Spectator*, when it came out, practised the little disingenuous art of concealing totally its French origin, and was full, as we now are at times, of the green-room tribute to its high excellence. 'The player who read (we are told) frequently threw down the book till he had given vent to the humanity which rose in him at some irresistible touches of the imagined sorrow.' But the tragedians of the city must have been rather different from their modern successors in consequence, however the case might be as to talent, when Steele, or Budgel, or Phillips himself, perhaps, could publish such a letter as the following, purporting to be signed by the actor who performed Orestes. George Powell had

surely not acted Shakespeare and Otway and Dryden to be unmanned by a dilution of French tragedy. Thus he is made to write, however:—

'MR. SPECTATOR,—I am appointed to act a part in the new tragedy called *The Distressed Mother*: it is the celebrated grief of Orestes which I am to personate; but I shall not act it as I ought, for I shall feel it too intimately to be able to utter it. I was last night repeating a paragraph to myself, which I took to be an impression of rage, and in the middle of the sentence there was a stroke of self-pity which quite unmanned me. Be pleased, sir, to print this letter, that when I am oppressed in this manner at such an interval, a certain part of the audience may not think I am out; and I hope, with this allowance, to do it to satisfaction. I am, Sir, your most humble servant,

GEORGE POWELL.

The most impudent part of the business here is the very slender knowledge imputed to a first-rate actor—his fear that on any discovery of emotion an audience who knew him should suppose that he was out; and the assurance of lowering even the style of the real author to support the assumed character, and putting the actor's name to the supplication of an undertaker, who hopes 'to do his work to satisfaction.' The truth is, that Powell was a scholar, and a very favourite actor, until his boundless intemperance closed the scene upon him. His friend, the *Spectator*, could take any liberty with such a man. He is represented as constantly inflaming himself with pure brandy, and making love upon the stage in so spirited a manner as to be extremely terrible to the ladies of the profession.

Racine's play was kept so completely out of sight that Powell might never have heard the danger of giving up the full bent of the actor to the part of Orestes—the violent exertion of its original representative, Montfleuri, absolutely killed him. The son of the poet tells us that it was whimsically said on this occasion:—'Tout poète désormais voudra avoir l'honneur de faire crever un comédien.'

Henriette Anne of England, the first wife of Monsieur,

brother of Louis XIV., was the avowed patroness of the French tragedy, and its success is said to have equalled even that of Corneille's famous *Cid*, which Colley Cibber so rashly adventured to translate. The *Bérénice* of Racine sprung also from her taste—the 'chroniclers of that time' say from her passions. But the *crêpe funèbre* with which Bossuet covered her remains secures her immortality, if genius be immortal.

Addison himself did not disdain to aid the success of Phillips's tragedy. He took Sir Roger de Coverley to see it acted, and made it the vehicle of some elucidation of the knight's peculiar character, and some remarks upon the play itself. An instance of each incidentally shall be pointed out. Upon Andromache's obstinate refusal of her lover, he exclaimed with a more than ordinary vehemence, 'You cannot imagine, sir, what it is to have to do with a widow.' And upon Pyrrhus's threatening afterwards to leave her, the knight shook his head and muttered to himself—'Ay, do, —if you can.' For criticism may be taken the following: 'He made, indeed, a little mistake as to one of the pages, whom, at his first entering, he took for Astyanax; but he quickly set himself right in that particular, though, at the same time, he owned he should have been very glad to have seen the little boy, "who," says he, "must needs be a very fine child by the account that is given of him."'

The absence of the child of Hector from the scene only, for his mother we hear visits him daily, will be regretted by more than the worthy knight just quoted; and particularly by those best acquainted with the resorts of tragic emotion. What a beautiful use is made by Southerne of the son of Biron, in *Isabella*, to check, and at length decide, the acceptance of Villeroy for a second husband! Such an accession as a visible Astyanax, I can have no doubt, would have fixed Mrs. Siddons to the widow of Hector, rather than the furious daughter of Helen. She acted Hermione with all that storm of passion which is characteristic of her nature and her provocations—but the rant of heroic passion, from her, begot a regret that the soft sorrows of Andromache lost so beautiful and so dignified a representative. Shall I say that I greatly preferred Mrs. Siddons in the relations of

wife and mother? Her affections always seemed to need the inspiration of some duty.

Dr. Delap had sufficient character as a classical scholar to secure the attention of managers to his dramatic efforts; though his Cambridge qualifications of D.D. and S.T.P. might seem to challenge his attention to very different objects. He commenced his tragic career with *Hecuba*, and being unable to find in Greek tragedy more divisions than the prologue, episode, and exode—the intervals being appropriated to the chorus—he divided his English *Hecuba* into three acts; the audience, too, restricted it to three nights' performance. But his living in Sussex does not seem to have possessed that *speluncam tetram et horridam* which his master Euripides found the proper site for tragic composition.

There is a love of the wild and gloomy which is apt to seduce the tragic writer from human passions to modes of existence fantastic and impossible. Ossian for a time seemed to be considered, like Homer, an epic writer from whom tragedy might be derived; but nothing was to be had but a few figures not very well defined, and an engraft of ancient barbarism upon the feelings and sentiments of polished life. *The Captives*, by Dr. Delap, displayed the well known names of Connal and Everallin and Malvina, to enchant the followers of Macpherson, and some passages of no slight power, divested of the affected sublimities of that impostor; but though Mrs. Siddons did her utmost in Malvina, and Kemble wore the Scottish dress (the only one, by the way, that the parsimony of that day would consent to in the tragedy), yet his play was treated as usual by the audience, and *The Captives*, like the great captive *Hecuba*, lived but three nights.

In the progress of Mrs. Siddons modern tragedy should not detain us long. The power of tragedy, I reluctantly say, had left the soil in which it once flourished most. The passions had owned the master-hands which alone could wield their powers, and refused to repeat themselves at the call of the humble mimics of our own times. Our great actress aided the sickly tragedy of *Percy* by acting the part of Elwina; but Miss More had not strength enough for the iron times of which this play faintly reminded us.



For the benefit of Mr. Kemble his sister was perhaps rejoiced to repeat the character of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, which had first introduced her to a London audience. I have nothing to add to what I formerly wrote upon this occasion. The nerve of the comedy is Shylock, and King was not the Jew which Shakespeare drew; though, as to Bassanio and Portia, perhaps those characters were never acted with more beautiful effect. Passion, however, is wanting, and the great enchantress quits her wand and the spells with which it could encircle her, to charm by personal graces and sensible elocution. The play has little real interest: it is a romance and suited to the closet. It is always felt to be impossible that Shylock should succeed, though the quibble may not strike by which he is to be defeated. In every Christian State the bond would be illegal from its tenor. The other incident of the caskets is too absurd to exist among the blaze of moral wisdom in which our poet has displayed it. The chance that good men may have inspirations as to the future should not subject human happiness to the decision of a lottery. There is as little doubt of Bassanio's success as of Shylock's failure. But no play more abounds in the peculiar splendour of diction by which Shakespeare sometimes delights to cover the feebleness of his fable. I ought also to notice the peculiarly musical flow of his lines in this play. Perhaps his works do not supply another instance of equal care in this particular; the absence of the stronger demands of passion and humour left him at full liberty to indulge the ear with his utmost sweetness.

The two benefit nights with which the policy of the management had clogged the engagement of Mrs. Siddons imposed upon her the unavoidable search after novelties of attraction. On her second night this season she acted Ophelia in *Hamlet*, and I retain the impression which it then made upon me, but little lessened by time or maturer study of the great author. It might at first be thought that her figure would not express the fragility of this lovely sacrifice to her affections; but the height was diminished by lowering the head-dress, and the countenance permitted not the eye to be discursive.

'Ophelia,' says a writer of great genius, 'is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon. O rose of May, O flower too soon faded! Her love, her madness, her death are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos. It is a character which nobody but Shakespeare could have drawn in the way that he has done, and to the conception of which there is not even the smallest approach, except in some of the old romantic ballads.' The same writer is disposed, however, to excuse some of the free language of Hamlet to this pure being 'as the license of the time.' I am sorry to find it, notwithstanding 'the fatness of these pursy times,' addressed to one who would hardly 'unmask her beauties to the moon.' Hamlet took a libertine pleasure in wounding the ear, allowing him to rely that Ophelia's blush

> 'Would never thaw the consecrated snow
> That lies in Dian's lap.'

There is a modesty that inspires decorum even to the dissolute. Full of the important business of the play, anxious to seem idle that his object might be concealed, he ought to have placed some guard upon his fancy when he forces a conversation with Ophelia. Hamlet is gross, at least in the original play.

Mrs. Siddons was the only great actress whom I ever saw in Ophelia; but in confirmation of a remark, made certainly with this instance strongly in view, what she gave, and alone was competent to give, was caviare to the multitude: too long accustomed to receive a dishevelled singer as the true and perfect image of Ophelia, all the fine essence of such a being, breathing through Siddons herself, hardly moved their wonder; though her deportment through the earlier scenes was a model of graceful virtue, and that of her distraction was the truest delineation that was ever made from a 'ruined piece of nature.' But methinks I hear some very inquisitive reader exclaim, 'What! Mrs. Siddons sing!' No, Sir, it was Ophelia who sang, or rather the melancholy of the poet Collins.

As to the dialogue—the 'thought and remembrance fitted'—the 'document in madness'—the dreadful 'There's rue for you' to the Queen, were then indeed powerfully

given. The art of playing this scene is beautifully unfolded by a 'Gentleman' in the original play. Hear what the poet of nature put into the mouth of a personage without a name:—

> 'She speaks much of her father; says she hears
> There's tricks i' the world; and hems, and beats her heart;
> Spurns enviously at straws; speaks things in doubt,
> That carry but half sense: her speech is nothing,
> Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
> The hearers to collection; they aim at it,
> And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts;
> Which, as her winks, and nods, and gestures yield them,
> Indeed, would make one think there might be thought,
> Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.'

Incidentally, because the passage follows this, I would beg leave to notice symptoms of no common guilt acknowledged by the Queen of Denmark:—

> '*Queen* To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
> Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss:
> So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
> It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.'

To the guilty mind every trifle seems pregnant with disaster. This is the nature of sin, to dread discovery from accidents unconnected with it in fact, and thus to drop indications of what it would conceal by an undue alarm at any occurrences that excite much attention.

The 'black and grained spots' upon her soul, which would not 'leave their tinct,' in the closet scene, seem to be equally visible to her fancy here, and argue strongly for her participation in the design, at least, of the murderer. She would not, like Lady Macbeth, 'bear the knife herself,' but had allowed her passions to triumph over her reason and her virtue, and stooped to prey on garbage. In the elder play the Queen disavows the murder; this declaration Shakespeare did not adopt; he, therefore, meant to load her with the full weight of the crime, from which two lines only would have relieved her. It may be observed too, that, as a righteous retribution, she at last perishes by the leprous distilment which her husband had prepared to destroy her son, as he had formerly destroyed his father.

To return to Mrs. Siddons, she closed the feast of this memorable day by performing the Lady in Milton's *Comus*,

—a character, be it observed, that I believe his own times to have not unfrequently exhibited. An estimate has been made, in which I entirely concur, that places the cultivated female of the middle of the seventeenth century greatly above her successors. For this fine picture of the sex we were indebted to the lives of the Hutchinsons.[1] But Milton himself has left us, in immortal verse, sketches of some ladies of his acquaintance by no means inferior to the heroine of his Masque. Her, for instance, of whom he writes:—

> 'Thy care is fix'd, and zealously attends
> To fill thy odorous lamp with deeds of light,
> And hope that reaps not shame.'

And that nearer object of his admiration, who, visiting his slumbers—

> 'Came vested all in white pure as her mind:
> Her face was veil'd, yet to my fancied sight,
> Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shin'd
> So clear, as in no face with more delight.'

Such we may fairly presume his Dowager Countess of Derby to have been, and such the lamented Marchioness of Winchester. Ben Jonson would supply us with other instances were they necessary upon the present occasion. Human nature is interested that the high-souled heroine of *Comus* should not be a creature of the fancy merely. The Lady of *Comus* is a high Platonist, and the monstrous rout of Comus are received as of times purely pagan; but the close of the drama introduces us to the splendid festivity of a feudal chieftain. The heaven that had tried the youthful progeny of this noble is the Christian heaven, and their faith has been subjected to trial equally with their truth and patience. The spirit, however, quits them at last for the Gardens of Hesperus; and celestial Cupid holds his Psyche entranced until that union is permitted from which love and joy are to be born—where, again, he plainly shadows that operation of divine love upon the human soul from which eternal happiness was to proceed as the crown of terrestrial virtue.

[1] See the 13th volume of *The Edinburgh Review*, and the beautiful article upon this subject, which contains the estimate above alluded to.

But an interest such as has been shadowed out, and a sublime and eloquent woman seen across an orchestra of fiddlers, with all the glitter of glass chandeliers, and all the vulgarity of a mixed audience as a chorus !—O no, such things are not theatrical; they belong to purer times, and the pastoral retreats of splendid rank and exalted virtue.

CHAPTER XVII

THE management of Drury Lane Theatre seemed to have no characteristic but indifference or sameness. Mrs. Siddons, in the season of 1786-87, repeated her former characters on her accustomed nights of acting, and on the 22nd of November Dodsley's *Cleone* was revived, and repeated on the 24th; but it then sank into its former repose, from which the maternal agonies of Mrs. Siddons (who must have been an eagle to a wren compared with the original heroine) were not mighty enough to preserve this affecting play, written by a most amiable and able man. I incline to think that even in this commercial land there is a reluctance to award the honours of letters to any of the sons of trade, however they may have been gifted by nature, cultivated by youthful or mature application. The bookseller might be considered an innovator among the makers of books. The early efforts of this pleasing writer had the honour to be patronised by Pope. Dodsley was often reminded by the petulant professors of polite letters that he had once worn a livery in the service of the Honourable Mrs. Lowther, but he soon exchanged it for that of the Muses, and honoured them by his offerings. Few men have placed upon our shelves productions of greater value than his fine collections of old plays and modern poems, with the admirable compendium of annual life called *Dodsley's Register*. That he should have retired from business with a handsome fortune was to be expected from the discernment of his mind and the prudence of his conduct. Nor was he parsimonious as to his authors. Mr. Burke, by the contract which I have seen, was to have had £600 for *An Essay towards an Abridgment of English*

History to the Reign of Queen Anne. It was stipulated, whimsically enough, that it should be printed in quarto, exactly like Jarvis's *Don Quixote.* Hughes, his printer, does not seem to have composed more than forty-eight pages of this work, of which Burke, however, wrote somewhere about two hundred and fifty of Jarvis's pages. I presume the appearance of Hume led Burke to view his own composition as rather oratory than history—it is a commentary upon events with which the reader is presumed to be already acquainted, and, I think, considerably resembles the *Letters of Bolingbroke on History.* However superior in some respects, more gorgeous even than St. John himself, imitation of that noble Lord clung to him through life, though he has spoken slightingly of him in his latter works, and thinks his master's writings have taken no hold upon his mind. For this digression, leading to such a genius as Burke, I apologise not to the admirers of Mrs. Siddons, whom that great man has immortalised by naming her with Garrick in his work on the French Revolution.

Our great actress presented her friends with *Cymbeline* as her first benefit, on the 29th of January, 1787. She performed Imogen in such a way as to at once satisfy the student of Shakespeare that if ever complete justice could be done to the loveliest of his female characters, that wonder was then achieved. The bad taste of former times was accustomed to lend itself to a miserable series of keen or coarse invectives against the sex. The satirist has dressed the libels in verse, and the daily delinquency of the man still dares to mutter the tuneful fragments upon the frailty of woman. But the real truth is, that absolute steadiness of affection, enduring all tests, and pardoning all neglects and even injuries, resides only in woman.

The essence of the sex, the pure and perfect chrysolite, is to be found in Shakespeare's Imogen. Nor is she a creature of the imagination. Neither is she the child alone of refinement. In humble life, and in the dangerous services of our army and navy, the village girl assumes the garb of the other sex, and fights and bleeds and dies beside the object of her untutored affection. Imogen, too, is the native of all climes.

In the first scene of the character Mrs. Siddons was fully aware of its almost infinite variety. Contempt for the affected courtesy of the Queen, the ardour of her affection for Posthumus, the delicacy of their interchange of tokens, the brutal rating of the King, answered quickly as in despair, and the perfect tone of her reply to Cymbeline's exclamation, 'What !—art thou mad ?'

> '*Imo.* Almost, Sir ; heav'n restore me !—would I were
> A neat-herd's daughter, and my Leonatus
> Our neighbour-shepherd's son !'

All these points, with the sarcasm as to Cloten expressed in language so truly feminine, opened a delineation which continued equally true in every feature to the end—

> 'I would they were in Afric both together,
> Myself by with a needle, that I might prick
> The goer-back !'

A scene succeeds this much too short to take deep effect upon the audience, though it is beautiful in the extreme. It is on the departure of Posthumus, and between Imogen and Pisanio—positively unrivalled in ardour and delicacy.

Few people would be at a loss to conceive how finely Mrs. Siddons would receive Iachimo, when he comes over upon his villainous enterprise—her appearance, as abating, from his poisons, somewhat of her confidence in her husband, and the amazing scorn and returning reliance which compel him to change his calumnies into panegyric. Imogen is nothing like the cautious Macduff; she does not say—

> 'Such welcome and unwelcome things at once,
> 'Tis hard to reconcile.'

She easily considers him to make amends for the freedom of his former speeches. Her virtue has no fierceness about it, and, knowing herself superior to all temptation, she is no longer indignant when she has brought her assailant to entertain for her a suitable respect. He comes from Posthumus, and at length speaks him truly. Her heart satisfies her reason, and his villainy immediately suggests to him a safer course. Iago himself is not so pure a rascal as Iachimo.

The scene of the trunk in the bed-chamber of Imogen is an admirable stage invention: the poet has used it to paint, with the richest colours, the sleeping charms of his heroine, and even by her favourite reading to infer her love of suffering virtue. 'Where Philomel gave up,' I presume alludes to her last feeling of the brutal violence of Tereus, who had torn out the tongue which reproached him. The beautiful Ovidianism closed her lecture—

'Ipsa jacet, terræque tremens immurmurat atræ.'

The arranging with Pisanio what relates to their journey to Milford Haven charactered a good deal like her Rosalind, and indeed the play partakes in a considerable degree of the character of *As You Like It*. It breathes of the country, but has the boldness of the mountaineer instead of the listless patience of the forester. The agony attending Pisanio's disclosure is written with a perfect luxury of power, and was acted so as to extend the captivations of the actress. The cave of Belarius, and the mingling with congenial nature, operates somewhat to banish the leading interest, yet it is recalled to us by the poet with his most consummate art, and the reference to it proceeds from the mouth of one who never heard of Posthumus, and is ignorant even of the very sex of Imogen. Hear Guiderius—

'I do note
That grief and patience, rooted in him both,
Mingle their spurs together.'

When Imogen is supposed dead by her brothers, the poet invests her with new charms, and she seems like the progeny of beings superior to humanity.

On the incidents thus alluded to in the cave, Schlegel, the great German critic upon Shakespeare, has the following admirable observation:—

'When a tragic event is one only in appearance, whether the spectator be informed of the fact or it be only designed that he should divine it, no poet so well as Shakespeare knows how to soften a melancholy impression without quite effacing it. He gives to grief a harmonious expression, and bestows in solemnity what he takes away in energy.'

What a comment on the exquisite dirge over the

entranced Imogen! I will just remark in passing that Mr. Collins's dirge, for the most part, preserves the images of Shakespeare; though the two first stanzas remind us of village life, rather than that of the forest or the mountain.

The character of Imogen is here closed: the rest is 'labour which is not used for her' any other way than as it explains the history of her dangers and restores her to Posthumus, for whom she retains an affection of which the reader inclines to think him hardly worthy.

When I assert that Mrs. Siddons was the only perfect Imogen that I have ever seen, I am fully aware that some representatives have more exactly answered to the fond and tender delineations of Fidele, which upon her recent loss are made by the two princes her brothers; that the form and style of features of Mrs. Siddons were essentially majestic, and her expression always of the most powerful kind; but we are to remember that in the male attire the female figure always becomes visually deceptive, and that I am not speaking of the Mrs. Siddons of 1802; that in reality Imogen is a character of infinite energy, and that the spectator must contribute to his own pleasure by overlooking the operation of that time upon the actress which has consummated her art; that when subsequently she had Charles Kemble and Decamp for her brothers, she looked indeed the perfect sister of the family, and the illusion was complete.

The amateurs of transformation in those days a little complained of the delicate style of her male attire; but it was exactly the straight or frock-coat and trousers of our modern beaux; and you saw, as you ought in fact to see, the attempt at the opposite sex not quite successful.

I restrict myself to the novelties of Mrs. Siddons's performance, because I made a determined point of seeing them in their succession, and never allowed any other attraction to dispute with the most refined of my amusements. She, I know, owed little to her admirer, but he has always retained a feeling of grateful respect towards the possessor of talents so distinguished; and in thus reviewing their effects, I, perhaps, render even a slight service to the admirers of the drama.

The character of the Countess in Jephson's *Count of Narbonne* was acted by her on the 8th of March, 1787, for the first time in London. It was unquestionably a melancholy picture of submissive dignity and maternal fondness —but without the invigorating passion of Lady Randolph. The flow of Jephson's versification had every grace from a speaker so accomplished, but whether from the spell of a first impression, or the almost enthusiastic quietism of Miss Younge, in this single instance I could almost prefer that lady to her far greater rival.

On the 29th of the same month she acted, on her brother's night, Lady Restless, in Murphy's diverting comedy of *All in the Wrong*. The wild and ingenious jealousy of Sir John and Lady Restless is complexional in them both ; but the poet has contrived the matter of recrimination with much adroitness—the use made of Beverley and Mrs. Marmalet is entirely of the French school. When he had once accepted the whole act of Molière's *Cocu Imaginaire*, Murphy could invent and talk what remained in the light and airy taste of our polished neighbours.[1] The business teems upon the spectator, and is never of that sort which the dullest may anticipate. You know that the husband and wife will be confirmed in their error, but the trick escapes you till it is played. Beverley is the stage original, I think, of Falkland in *The Rivals*, and Sheridan has remembered his obligation by making that name the assumed one of Lydia Languish's lover, Captain Absolute.

[1] It suited Murphy to acknowledge, by an advertisement, some hints received from the *Cocu Imaginaire* of Molière ; and the author of the *Biographia Dramatica* takes his word for it, and proceeds to compliment him upon his fable, and the conduct of it—his characters and so forth. The truth, however, is that the Sganarelles are merely one step lower in life than the restless pair, and in some parts of his dialogue Murphy even forgets that ; but he translates literally whole scenes, distended, observe, by the intrusion of additional characters. The French piece is of one act, containing twenty-four scenes or changes of some of the characters. To know the extent of Murphy's obligations, the reader should peruse the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth of Molière's scenes—then the eighth and ninth, and lastly the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth. He will find the 'hints' full of the most ample detail : and the dialogue rather flattened, as it must be, containing no compensation for either Molière's verse or his rhymes. I am obliged to add that the author would now be invaluable who could even steal us such plays as Murphy's—but the sources are exhausted, and our neighbour all but as poor as ourselves.

Mrs. Siddons had as much bustle as the restless lady required, and spoke the dialogue naturally and skilfully; but the laughter excited was not of the hearty kind. How Miss Haughton played it from Murphy's instruction I have no knowledge; but we know that Yates was his Sir John Restless, and I think there is more actual comedy in the wife than in the husband. I believe a repetition of the play was not called for on the present occasion; and whether welcome or otherwise the general judgment seemed to be that at least modern comedy did not come within the range of our great tragedian. I have ventured before to think the very attempt impolitic, as sullying the consequence of female tragedy. Mrs. Yates, it should be remembered, in this comedy acted Belinda (Beverley's Julia), not Lady Restless; and Mrs. Yates had more of Siddons than any previous tragedian of that age.

The revival of *The Count of Narbonne* at Drury Lane Theatre was the precursor of a new tragedy by Captain Jephson, called *Julia*. The exertions of Mrs. Siddons and her brother in the former play had suggested to the ingenious author a second display of her powerful talent, in which the passions should be touched in a deeper and alarming key, and love and jealousy and hatred excite all that was terrible in dramatic effect. Mentevole, the part assigned to Mr. Kemble, worked out considerably beyond the Julia in the composition of the play, whatever might have been designed in the sketch. It was the true Italian lover. The incident, it seems, had once actually occurred in Guernsey, for frantic passion is confined to no one spot; the author, however, was certainly judicious in choosing that soil for the birth of his hero which is said to engender alike the deadliest crime and the greatest genius, and every produce is luxuriant even to rankness.

'It is the bright day that brings forth the adder.'

This play is 'the image of a murder' done in Genoa, where, on the eve of his intended marriage, a young nobleman is found murdered. As he wore a picture of the bride, his assassin, passionately enamoured of her, brings it away

with him. Finding the brother of the deceased likely, as he thinks, to become another bar to his wishes, he challenges him. The lady, to prevent the probable mischief, sends a message to him by his sister, who finds him in rapturous ecstasies over a portrait, which he lets fall. Upon taking it up she discovers it to be a miniature of Julia, superbly set in brilliants. With the true female estimate of such shining testimonials of affection, she carries it back with her, and leaves it upon her toilet. It is there, not very naturally, but very necessarily, discovered by the mother of the deceased, who, knowing that her wretched son wore it when he was assassinated, infers a complicity between its present possessor and the person from whom it must have come into her hands—it is traced to Mentevole, and Julia is seen to have been entirely innocent. The assassin finishes the turbulent career of his passion by stabbing the woman on whom he doats before he is led off to suffer for his guilt.

The exertions of Kemble were so great as to prevent him from acting again for a considerable time; and the motion adjourned *sine die* here, as on a more real stage, is commonly lost. It is, perhaps, more truly tragic than any other effort of the same author. But when I read it some years since, I could not help regretting the absence of another power as essential as terror, without which healing spring the wounds of tragedy are too harsh and deep to be endured. Tragedy may fitly rest upon villainy in progress, for you sympathise with the sorrows of its victims as they succeed each other; but the mere detection of a murder seems better trusted to a court of justice than the drama.

The metaphorical language of Mentevole has been blamed by certain critics—but they should know that they have Longinus against them; who tells us that 'the proper time for metaphor is when the passions are so swelled as to hurry on like a torrent.' The figures, however, should share in the character of such turbid emotions, and be cloudy and indistinct, broken and irregular. The most perfect exemplification of this rule of the great critic may be found in the page of the greatest of poets.

'And Pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or Heaven's cherubim, hors'd
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye.'
Macbeth.

When some blockheads once quoted this passage to Ben Jonson, as one they thought in its expression strained and unnatural, he told them 'it was horror.' They gave the world one more proof how much discernment they wanted, by conceiving that great man to have concurred with them in the censure; whereas he vindicated his friend, and laid down the true law by which passion emits its expression, in a single word—'it is horror.'

Julia was even unfortunate during its preparation. Mr. Colman had written an epilogue which Mrs. Siddons, after some deliberation, refused to speak. At this distance of time it would be difficult to conceive what could induce her to turn round the most brilliant epilogue writer of the age, and deny to either Jephson or herself the interest which attached to any production of an author so admired and esteemed; himself, too, an admirable critic, and moreover a manager of a London Theatre.

Mr. Colman was naturally much hurt by the disrespect shown to his Muse; and he was even angry when he heard from rumour that the cause was its alleged indecency. For this strange notion I can discover no ground, unless it might be thought indelicate to allude to an Italian lover. 'Happy is the lady,' says Mr. Colman, 'born in England—

'With pity who beholds poor Julia's fate,
Yet prizes, as she ought, her happier state;
The charms of English worth who can discover,
And never wish for an Italian lover.'

It had originally been designed for Miss Farren. Mrs. Siddons, however, was so important to the play that it was deemed advisable to compliment her with the epilogue. Now all this was injudicious. Why should an actress, who dies during the play, be compelled to giggle down her own serious effects, simply to have the unnecessary plague of recovering instantly from what is supposed to be great toil, and even pain, and ask personally the reward of her exer-

tions? Surely to convert the gloom that has been inspired into pleasant feelings is better suited to the natural comedian than the daughter of Melpomene. I do not like to see that I can be tortured at so little an expense of suffering by the actress. Illusion there must be, but it should not look like a trick; and I should hate the buffoon who, rising from the curse of Lear, could run off the stage in the mimic character of Harlequin.

It is no mean gratification, in writing the memoirs of such a genius as Mrs. Siddons, that the regard every author feels for his subject calls upon his discretion for no sacrifice of the merits of others. He can view them in their course and speak of their excellence; he can follow them to the grave and be the register of their fame. This reflection is suggested by the death of Mrs. Yates, which occurred on the 3rd of May, 1787.

This great performer began her town essays with the same incident as Mrs. Siddons herself. She was engaged by Mr. Garrick in one year, and discharged or permitted to retire the next, as no longer worth retaining. When, upon her marriage with Yates, she returned to Drury Lane Theatre, she was endured for the most part as a substitute in any indisposition of Mrs. Cibber; and, in 1759, was perhaps the most beautiful representative of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, then compressed for the stage, by his editor, Capell.

She had decided talents for comedy, and at the death of Mrs. Cibber, in 1766, was left without a rival in tragedy. It is difficult to account for her frequent retirements from the London theatres, except that the excellence which is alike admitted by the public and the managers may in a commercial estimate not be quite worth the emoluments which, the rare talent considered, it may by no means be avaricious to demand.

I could obviously only see her in my youth. But it is impossible to forget the dignity of her person, the beauty of her features, and the pensive music of her declamation. She had a decided preference, it should seem, for tragedies of the descriptive kind, and gave a graceful existence to compositions of little more than tuneful feebleness. The

gentler passions seemed more within her scope than the terrible. Her Andromache was distinguished by all the tenderness of soul which our imagination bestows upon the widow of Hector. Her last performance was the Duchess of Braganza, in Jephson's play, on the 24th of May, 1785, when she acted for the benefit of Mrs. Bellamy, who had once been no mean rival even to Mrs. Cibber herself.

I should not forget the manner in which she recited Sheridan's monody on Garrick, which, however unsuited to the stage, inasmuch as it flows in a languor of melodious verse at great length, with few breaks, no bold apostrophes, and no attempts at impersonation, yet I cannot but pronounce to have charmed me beyond anything that I had previously heard from a human voice. It taught me what it was that Henderson intended six years afterwards to combine with his own public readings. Had he lived, the design would have taken effect the year following, 1786; but the close of 1785 put an end to his efforts; and within a year and a half his beautiful associate followed him, and our hopes of amusement were doomed to a frightful disappointment—a herd of presumptuous spouting mediocrity invaded their desk, and poor reading was not permitted to die a natural death among us.

The English, I am truly afraid, are fond of the striking, the forcible, and the explosive—it is a tendency that grows upon them, and will leave in their amusements nothing but pantomime and mechanical contrivance. There have been writers among us who once persuaded Mrs. Siddons to quit the gentle, and I will say the virtuous Shore, for that professing, shameless wanton, Alicia. On the 7th of May she made the experiment, and amazed the distant gods. I cannot but be of opinion that Rowe intended in this lady to exemplify a very favourite lesson, that in woman the departure from chastity is usually the loss of every virtue. Her mind seems framed only for irregular but brilliant passion, and she attributes her particular feeling to the whole sex. Finding her dearest and most intimate friend dejected and in tears from the consequences of her past life, she chooses as a topic of consolation that she must once have been happy, when a glittering court and its

amorous monarch were sighing at her feet. The presentiment of Shore looks to the result of all this mischief, and announces it as at no great distance from her. Alicia has a blessing in reserve for her unhappy friend, a female friendship superior to all the assaults of adversity. The trusting Shore confides to this remaining blessing a casket containing her jewels, and Alicia thus imprecates a curse upon her own conduct:—

> 'If I not hold her nearer to my soul
> Than every other joy the world can give,
> Let poverty, deformity, and shame,
> Distraction and despair, seize me!'

The scene changes only once; Lord Hastings arrives at Shore's house from the court: not encouraged by her, he has formed designs upon her person; and this friend instantly flies to ruin them both—in which her headlong passion fully succeeds. Distraction and despair, invoked on her apostasy from the faith pledged to poor Shore, are shown to have seized upon her, but surely it is impossible she should excite the smallest sympathy from the beginning to the end. She blazes fiercely in rhymed couplets at the closes of the violent scenes in which she is engaged, and excites a senseless applause for ravings that disgrace her sex. I never heard any lady but one of the theatre utter a syllable upon the character of Alicia—in the theatre we endure this fiend because we admire the actress who is her representative—but we can only think in private upon Shore.

The great actress held on this occasion opinion with Pythagoras. Her soul appeared to be as much at home in the second habitation as it had been in the first, and seemed to have lost every particle of compassion for her former self; in plainer language, nothing whatever of Shore appeared in Alicia. But scream for scream, and distortion for distortion, the Alicia of Mrs. Crawford was many degrees more terrific than that of Mrs. Siddons. The 'nodding ruin' of the former was announced in the wild scream of the vulture; and of the whole rant it might be truly said—

> 'This nothing is much more than matter.'

The intellectual dignity of Mrs. Siddons rendered everything of this sort a degradation of her talents. Where in truth could she wish to reign but in the heart or in the judgment? But guilty passion is still passion; and in the scene with Hastings she poured out her tenderness and her confession, her contrition and agony, in tones which more perhaps than half surprised our pity.

From Rowe up to Shakespeare is a distance that no geometry can compute—and yet, what should we now be willing to give to the poet who could produce such a tragedy as *Jane Shore*? But we are grown too familiar with our actual wealth, and accept inferior metal for the sake of variety, though we know it to be intrinsically worthless, and that it cannot last.

Another instance of the taste about the benefit nights of Mrs. Siddons is to be recorded. On the 21st of January, 1788, the tragedy of *King Lear* was revived, in which she herself performed Cordelia, a character of no great power; and it may, therefore, be presumed that her principal object in the choice was to show Mr. Kemble in King Lear. The play acted was Nahum Tate's alteration, who has the fame of contriving the love intrigue between Cordelia and Edgar, without which circumstance, perhaps, the youngest daughter of Lear would hardly have been deemed of sufficient importance to call upon the talents of a great actress. But it is usually dangerous to meddle with the fable of another man's play. Alterations can seldom be so fitted as not to leave some original provision neglected. For instance, upon the frantic desertion of Cordelia by Lear, in the original play, the King of France, feeling himself rich in the possession of her virtues, bears her away with him to that kingdom—whence she subsequently returns with an army to punish the persecutors, and heal the maladies of her father. Tate keeps her unconnected and in Britain through the play, that he may finally bestow her upon Edgar, without reflecting that as she had forfeited her third of the kingdom, and must be equally obnoxious with Lear himself to her dog-hearted sisters, there was for her no comfortable or splendid establishment within the verge of the court, and that she must be as certain a wanderer as

her father. But in the true style of chivalrous romance—from which the means of existence are to Sancho's astonishment so constantly withdrawn—she, in her unprotected state, attended by her confidante Aranthe, in their poor thin court covering, which scarcely keeps them warm, ventures out in the pitiless storm to find the wretched Lear; and in the fifth act she is discovered in a chamber, we must presume her own, with physicians and armed knights awaiting the result of the means used under her direction for his recovery, in defiance of the sovereign prohibition making it death to relieve him. And all this inconsistency and absurdity is brought upon us, that Cordelia, in the night and the storm, may be seized by the emissaries of Edmund, delivered by the seeming lunatic Edgar, who is caressed by her as the best and dearest of men, and in his beggar's garb receives that return of affection which had been refused to his happier hour.

I do not mean to say that such a scene would be objectionable, if it would naturally work with the business of the play; for though it breaks in upon the filial singleness of Cordelia's mind, and the lover takes his turn to reign with the father there, yet female interest should be had for our audiences if it can be admitted without serious injury to the work. Kent here, when he determined himself upon his course, might have bestowed upon Cordelia the possession of his land and the use of his fortune: but this resource should have been made known to us, which it is not in the play as acted by Mr. Kemble.

There is one part of Tate's alteration which every reader will approve: he has made the unnatural daughters profligate and oppressive sovereigns.

> 'The riots of these proud imperial sisters
> Already have impos'd the galling yoke
> Of taxes, and hard impositions, on
> The drudging peasant's neck, who bellows out
> His loud complaints in vain. Triumphant queens!
> With what assurance do they tread the crowd!'

To be sure Edmund, although their gallant, speaks of them as if he were at least a reprover of their vices; but as everything that Tate does must be more or less inconsistent,

the lover not only is disposed to second their riots, but would reign himself precisely in the same outrageous manner! Having immediately after this speech received *billets-doux* from the two sisters, he naturally thinks of going through the family, and violating Cordelia in the storm. But it is really shocking to see the inventions of Shakespeare thus placed at the mercy of Bedlam and the Mint, in which latter asylum for indolent sottish imbecility Tate dozed away much of his existence. The Church may owe him something, for he translated the Psalms in conjunction with Dr. Brady; but his new version of *Lear* should neither be sung nor said on any stage in Christendom.

For the just limits of stage innovation the reader may consult the elder Colman's alteration of this play for Powell. In compliance with the general taste, he has preserved both Lear and Cordelia, without disturbing her union with the King of France, and has retained nothing of Tate but the animating speech of Cordelia which follows the mental recovery of her father in the fifth act. It is proper to observe that Mrs. Siddons gave this with a filial tenderness, an ardour, and a piety highly impressive. It closes a very pathetic scene by bringing down that vehemence of applause that a performer must have to keep him from being dissatisfied with his own effects, and flat in spirit from the coldness of the house.

The money receipt at the door, I mean reckoning every admission at the proper rate, was £347, 10s., almost equal to the famous night of *Macbeth*, the greatest that Drury Lane Theatre had ever known. The presents, it is probable, declined in their amount. In the advance towards the highest fame, the growing splendour of the actress increases our respect and diminishes our zeal. Patronage is protection, and to that acknowledged genius becomes superior —there is an apprehension of offence if more is tendered than the proper consideration for the box we occupy.

In another work I have noticed Mrs. Cowley's *Fate of Sparta*, a tragedy in which Mrs. Siddons acted the part of Chelonice. I presume everything to have been done for it that the subject admitted—its success, for modern tragedy, was beyond the usual measure, though Mr. Kemble sunk under

the part of Cleombrotus. Mrs. Cowley had supplied Mrs. Siddons with an epilogue exactly suited to the taste of the stage professor; that is, quite personal, and seducing and ensuring the claps of the audience. For a taste, and a future model together—

> 'Your hands they ask—such thunders do not fright—
> Repeat the peal once more—and then, good night.'

Mr. Kemble took his annual night on the 13th of March, and as a novelty gave *Katharine and Petruchio*, the wrangling pair by Mrs. Siddons and himself. Perhaps it was never better acted, if you could get over the conviction that such a physiognomy as that of the actress never could belong to a termagant; and that if the bent of mind had once been given, it would not have been possible for the teasing, violent, and harassing discipline of Petruchio to have tamed down such a woman to so absurd an obedience to his pleasure. Of a petulant spoiled girl the transformation might be credited. The incidents are farcical, and the whip and the crockery make noise enough for the joke's sake; but there never could be an atom of farce in the composition of Mrs. Siddons, though her name might always be useful, 'set it to what point you would.'

The hopes of man are subject to failure when security is rendered the most probable. The last season and the present offer two striking examples. Capt. Jephson and his friends at the Castle had so distinguished themselves in the early support of Mr. Kemble and Mrs. Siddons, that, with his great talent to bear up their exertions, *Julia* might have reckoned upon a triumphant and durable existence on the London stage. The illness of Mr. Kemble destroyed her.

Mr. Greatheed might have equally relied upon the success of his *Regent*. He had written a part for Mr. Kemble quite up to his wishes, and in all probability fashioned by his advice; and the heroine Dianora was in the hands of Mrs. Siddons, who in the outset of life had resided with the Greatheed family, whose subsequent celebrity had been welcomed by their warmest friendship, and who must have had peculiar pleasure in returning one

description of protection for another. But her health unluckily failed her after the second night, and the run of the piece—a mighty matter—was unfortunately checked.

The interest of *The Regent* is of the true Spanish cast. Inflexible design, dark and deadly means, and that tyranny exercised upon the maternal bosom which only shows that it contends in vain against the strongest principle in female nature. The husband, supposed to be murdered, survives to return at the critical moment, and redeem his wife and child from the fierce grasp of the Regent. Kemble in the present play looked like one of those grand and terrible beings who desolated Spanish America; a class of men to be found, I would fain hope, only under peculiar excitements in any nation.

I will not refuse myself the pleasure of noticing that Mr. Greatheed seems to have strongly felt the characteristic fulness and power of Shakespeare's soliloquies. The following ruminations of Manuel remind the reader of his Richard, and are no feeble rivals of his nervous diction:—

> 'My crime is past,—and, if there shall be judgment,
> Will damn me certain:—then, be this my heaven.
> But who, lynx-ey'd, has peer'd beyond the grave,
> And view'd that phœnix immortality?
> No—all may crumble in sepulchral night,
> And then have I the better of the game,
> Dost thou exist, or is thy being null,
> Thou whom I sent to learn these mysteries?
> If thou art blessed, I shall be a demon;
> Therefore I hope thine essence is no more.'

When we know, too, that this was a first play, and see how at times he could attain the just medium between tumour and flatness, we may regret that he did not pursue the obvious bent of his genius, and adorn at least his own times with compositions which at least reminded us by an emulous spirit of our former glories. He dedicated *The Regent* to Mrs. Siddons. Mr. Greatheed was assailed by all the outrageous and rancorous wantonness of criticism; but he was a gentleman, and continued silent.

For her second night this season Mrs. Siddons took the masterwork of Dryden, *All for Love*, and performed his

Cleopatra. The distinction which I should make between the queens of Shakespeare and Dryden is that the one displays the cause and the other the effect. Everything is said by Dryden that can describe unbounded passion—that is done in Shakespeare which alone can keep it without diminution; his Cleopatra is a character of infinite variety.

Dryden appears to me to have exhausted himself in all the artifices of poetical embellishment. His play is luxuriant in the happiest combinations of language. Nor does he confine the charm to the highest personages. I know not that there is anything better than the following, put into the mouth of Alexas :—

> 'Believe me, madam, Antony is yours;
> His heart was never lost, but started off
> To jealousy, love's last retreat and covert,
> Where it lies hid in shades, watchful in silence,
> And listening for the sound that calls it back.'

One part of his subject was beyond his power: the interview which he was tempted to write between the proud Egyptian charmer and Octavia, the sister of Cæsar and the wife of Antony. It is inconceivably vulgar; for their passions are too vehement to allow of the temperaments of their rank. The best sentence of their rival malice is with Cleopatra—

> 'Your lord, the man who serves me, is a Roman.'

Octavia is once even indecent. It is, I have no doubt, the worst scene in the play, and ends its third act.

I never found that the audience sympathised very strongly with Cleopatra. Antony's passion for her is the weakness of a hero, and her love for him is not the virtue of either her sex or condition. She is, I think, barely endured, for she does not attempt to render her error respectable by her remorse.

Shakespeare, who better understood, or more closely adhered to, Nature, has represented Cleopatra as capricious as alluring, and as facile as fond. She can tease the being whom she loves, and betray the hero whom she cannot survive. That Mrs. Siddons did everything that could be

desired for the Cleopatra of *All for Love* is readily granted. She was a being for whom the world indeed might seem 'well lost.' But from the commanding style of her features and the dignity of her person the notion of frailty was visually banished—she seems always to be superior to her condition. The daring atrocity of crime was, however, her own. She could completely unsex herself as Lady Macbeth, and repel the scorns of the world in Calista; but the pageant of romance, the Cleopatra of Dryden, had nothing that suited her, and did not range among her acting parts.

Of Shakespeare's superior genius the world has heard enough, though perhaps hardly yet felt sufficiently; but of his superior judgment little, indeed, has been said. Dryden has gone over the famous passage of the Cydnus, and so fertile was his fancy that he has left a rival description of much beauty; but he lost the great point—that is, to show the magic of his Egyptian by her effects. In Dryden Antony himself describes this gorgeous scene to the blushing Dolabella. In Shakespeare the whole world is gone to gaze on Cleopatra, and the master of it,

> 'Enthron'd i' the market place did sit alone,
> Whistling to th' air.'

This is beyond all the silken streamers and the cloth of gold—the seeming Cupids and Nereids, and the love-sick winds that wafted the imperial beauty; or rather it describes the scene more impressively than the highly apposite terms chosen by either poet. It is wiser frequently to suggest to the imagination than to satiate it. As these passages stand in the plays, Dryden's convinces us of the dotage only of Antony, Shakespeare's of the perfect attraction of Cleopatra. In the first, his fondness seems to have embellished her voyage; in the second, he is rendered a nullity by it, and, but that he is named by the poet, would have been forgotten by us, as he was by the people.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was certainly a point of great importance to Mrs. Siddons that her brother, Mr. Kemble, should at all events be the stage manager of Drury Lane Theatre, and that for reasons which equally affected her family and her fame. How her fame itself was dependent upon such an arrangement shall be shown. Perhaps no actress ever stood so strongly alone as Mrs. Siddons. The tenth, twentieth, and thirtieth repetition of many of her characters, hackneyed as they had previously been for half a century by every actress worthy of the name, had still an attraction in her powers of the most respectable and profitable kind. Some of them, it is true, became a little the worse for wear; but, generally speaking, what had first charmed her audiences preserved their affection beyond the useless and hopeless trials of what novelty might produce.

The genius of the age was certainly not of a dramatic cast; it supplied nothing that could be even wished to survive beyond the ninth representation, when the poet commonly found that two benefits might have been more profitable to him than three. But it was a somewhat rare occurrence to reach that consummate number of the Muses. There was in fact, therefore, no increase to her list of parts, and an endless sameness, it might be foreseen, would wear out alike the energy of the actress and the attention of the town.

The retirement of Smith from the stage was followed by that of King from the management, if management that could be called which had no feature of the function but

its name. He describes himself as having by no written agreement the power either to accept or reject any new dramatic work; to engage, encourage, or discharge any one performer; nor to order the refitting of a single article in a worn-out wardrobe. To our still greater surprise he adds that he had not even the wish to possess privileges supposed to reside exclusively in the proprietors of the concern. How he had been tempted to lend himself, his talent, his consideration, to the servile duties that could alone remain to his situation, he has not explained; but he might receive occasional promises, which were made only to pacify and be forgotten; and, indeed, hope that the exigency of the case would at last bestow what the most indolent love of power was so loth to relinquish.

In such effusions of spleen the grievance most felt is commonly undeclared, and I cannot but suppose the feelings of a comic actor somewhat hurt at the ascendency of tragedy, and his perception that the actual power of Mr. Kemble and his sister in the theatre must render him now an absolute cypher in the concern. The comedians who had adhered to him through life were withdrawing fast from his standard; and the school of Garrick must shortly submit to other masters than those who had presided in its various classes. He knew, I conceive, that his retirement made way for Mr. Kemble's certain appointment.

Upon the peculiar studies and accomplishments of Mr. Kemble enough has been said in the author's *Memoirs* of his late friend; it is here only necessary to show how they eventually aided the impression even of Mrs. Siddons herself. In his system of management Mr. Garrick was certainly the model followed by Mr. Kemble. They both, for the same reason, built principally upon Shakespeare, and looked to his characters as the materials of which their own consequence was to be composed. The difference between these great actors was, that Garrick (as indeed he well might do) depended more upon himself; and with respect to the combination of other great talents with his own, or the minor embellishments proceeding from the utmost attention to the whole cast of the play, a picturesque costume as to the dresses, and scenery of reasonable

accuracy, he was careless, perhaps disdainful; or, as he had decided upon a certain scale of expense which was not to be exceeded, he employed his scene-painters and his tailors religiously upon the festivals of Christmas and Easter, and left the drama, plainly and decently got up, to the genius of the poet and the actor.

Mr. Kemble, with respect to our dramatic authors, had something of the feeling of a commentator; he was born for accuracy, and was convinced that the very text spoken upon our stages needed the most careful revision; as we grew accustomed to our elder language by the frequent republication of Shakespeare the numberless substitutions of familiar for obsolete expressions were now to be struck out; and our great poet upon the stage rendered more strictly like his own words in the closet. He thought, in a word, that the stage should evince a proper attention to the prevailing studies of the times. If this was his opinion as to the language of our plays, he considered the mode in which they were exhibited still more open to improvement. Too many and too considerable demands were made upon the imagination of the spectators 'to piece out with their thoughts' the imperfections of the stage. He saw no reason why the representation in the seeming magnificence of the action should yield to the reality, and that it should be true as well as splendid was a principle of illusion which was likely by its air of learning to recommend show itself to such as affect to despise it unless it has the *verd antique* about it accurately coloured.

The older notion as to acting was that the power of the actor, 'the bright metal on a sullen ground,' was all-sufficient, and needed not the aid of ornament: everything subordinate, as it could make little effect, it was policy to slur over. Kemble, on the contrary, looking to a larger field of exertion and more ample means, made the whole so perfect and splendid and interesting that the greatest talents alone could be borne with in the higher characters of the drama. He consequently established the ascendency of himself and his sister by the very accompaniments that would have rendered feebler merits contemptible.

When, therefore, he had accepted the management of Drury Lane Theatre he bent every faculty he possessed to improve stage representation. By the good taste of his alterations of the plays themselves, the fitness of the performers for the parts allotted to them, and the knowledge that now regulated the dresses, the properties, and the scenery of his revivals, a management that was assailed at times by puny ridicule, and often thwarted by the treasury as to supplies, and performers from a natural desire after eminence, became really an era in the art—so excellent as absolutely to admit of no subsequent improvement. He felt that the style of his own acting was gaining ground upon ancient prejudices; and he never doubted for a moment that he should ultimately establish the grand and poetic, the *beau idéal*, as the standard of art among us. To second all his designs he had the finest tragic actress in the world, who began to feel that either novelty must be provided, or a novel gloss be given to the old, or her attraction must at length decline. Shakespeare had still some demands unsatisfied upon her. Lady Macbeth had enchanted with spells more potent than ever muttered over the cauldron of the witches, and the Roman matron promised to add a distinctive feature to her past achievements, while Queen Katharine tempted her with the promise of more true majesty, mental dignity, and persistive virtue than were ever combined to constitute female excellence in the imagination of man. She had but one abatement to her triumph—that it it could never now be witnessed by her admirer, Doctor Johnson.

It might be imagined that some impediments stood in the way of this ascendency of the Tragic Muse. With the vivacity of a comic writer, Mr. Sheridan had done his utmost to cover the business and the manners of tragedy with ridicule, and he had levelled his satire, not, like the authors of *The Rehearsal*, at the tragedies then in vogue, but at the resorts of all tragedy; and *The Critic* seems in some few points but little to regard the prescriptive veneration attached to the tragedies of a distant age. When, in addition to all this, he invents the absurdity he cannot find, and ascribes his monstrous nonsense to a man of consum-

mate ability, namely Puff, it is quite clear his attack is levelled rather at the composition than the writer; and that he would thus indirectly recommend that style of entertainment to which his own particular genius inclined him.

It is not my intention here to enter into an examination of Mr. Sheridan's dramatic talents. When a writer has produced plays of brilliant and lasting reputation, it would be ungenerous to assemble all the originals of his characters and trace his situations to their source; to examine how a very common thought is rendered pungent, and the face of novelty bestowed upon a very ancient simile or sarcasm. A late publication[1] has shown this surprising man, whose name among us was almost synonymous to indolent genius, to have been the most pertinacious and elaborate polisher of points of dialogue that probably ever existed; to have always been storing up a magazine of figure and illustration, to be used as occasion might demand; and even to watch that occasion with solicitude, or force it by address, when the painful result of much reflection and study was to fall from him as the meteor of the moment, and dazzle his hearers by a kind of mental wonder, the quickness of whose production was only equalled by the brilliancy of its point.

If the author of *The School for Scandal* approached Congreve in the stream of wit characteristic of both, there was another excellence, one of art, in which he was quite equal to his great master; I mean the suiting the sentence exactly to the organ, and being sure of the fancy and the judgment, taking care that the rhythm should please as much almost as the reason or the wit, and the ear anticipate the triumph of the appeal to the understanding; sentences written to be spoken tried upon the tuneful tongue of the writer, and thus never suffered to hang upon that of the actor. The declamation of Mr. Sheridan had always this pointed and musical character; and when he quoted the rebuke to Mammon in Spenser, during his famous speech in Westminster Hall, a kind of audible surprise was felt that he should recite poetry so finely; but the prose of

[1] Moore's *Life of Sheridan.*

his whole life was to the full as metrical as even the verse of Spenser.[1]

That Mr. Sheridan could have long continued to supply even such dialogue as distinguishes his *School for Scandal* and the first act of his *Critic* I feel no difficulty to admit; but I am rather disposed to think his mind not so affluent in character nor so inventive of dramatic business as would be demanded for any long reign of a comic writer. He does not seem to have discerned much of what constitutes character—his personages have commonly been seen before, if not dressed with equal neatness or elegance. The artist, I confess, appears always before me. It is the attribute of genius to conceal all labour. Not to mention him with whom there can be no comparison, Mr. Sheridan could not have gathered the endless train of humours which crowded about the discernment of Molière. Besides that he always

[1] The reader might with some reason complain if I left him to his own search as to the passage quoted by this great orator. Indeed it was combined from two distant stanzas in the seventh canto of the second book of the *Faerie Queene*. As he spoke the lines they seemed closely connected :—

> 'Mammon, said he, thy godhead's vaunt is vaine,
> And idle offers of thy golden fee;
> To them that covet such eye-glutting gaine
> Proffer thy giftes, and fitter servaunts entertaine.
> Another bliss before mine eyes I place,
> Another happiness, another end,
> And to be lord of those that riches have,
> Then them to have my selfe, and be their servile sclave.'

In this manner did he choose to repel the assertions of Mr. Hastings's friends that the Governor-General had never been avaricious, and, with all the treasures of the East at his disposal, had made no provision for himself or family, and that he was now absolutely a poor man.

It was on the present occasion that I saw the historian Gibbon in the managers' box. Sheridan seized the opportunity to combine the 'luminous page of the philosopher with the correct periods of Tacitus'; and Mr. Gibbon on the occasion says, 'nor could I hear without emotion the personal compliment which he paid me in the presence of the British nation.'

On this trial I saw Burke sensibly touched by a compliment from the third counsel for Mr. Hastings, Mr. Dallas. The learned advocate said of the great manager that 'if he had been cast into the times of Zenobia he would have been found, like Longinus in the train of his ungrateful mistress, less concerned at the fate which awaited him than at the weakness by which she had sacrificed the noblest of her friends.' To this, in the politest manner, Mr. Burke audibly said, 'Very well indeed, sir.'

reminds you of some predecessor, there is little absolute nature even in his finest scenes. More merriment has seldom been produced than we find in his *Rivals*, but the characters are violently overcharged. The vocabulary of Mrs. Malaprop is full of expressions so removed from ordinary use that she must have stumbled upon more meaning even in the search of her terms. Acres is not to be credited any more than Sir Anthony Absolute; they are, however, diverting absurdities beyond the latitude of nature, who yet, it must be confessed,

'Showers with copious hand.'

But whatever might have been the result of a steady application to the drama on the part of Mr. Sheridan, he had determined to run the greater course as a politician, and eclipse even his celebrity as a dramatic writer by his fame as an orator. And, strange as it may be to say it, he succeeded; at least thus far, that he impressed those who heard him in Westminster Hall that they had then witnessed the grandest display of talent of ancient or modern times. And, perhaps, so large an assembly as that which concurred in this opinion could not be entirely deceived. Yet I may be permitted to think that he did wisely in authentically trusting it only to the ear. The ostentation and boldness of its figures, its affectation of displaying all the knowledge that he must have painfully gathered together, its florid style, its eternal exclamation and appeals to violated nature and morals—all bore too much of the character of Irish oratory, and would have looked in the closet to the dispassionate reader timid and artificial. I heard Mr. Burke's fine summing-up, and I found there the full dignity of long-treasured wisdom, an imagination rich but not gaudy, and at times invested with an almost prophetic awfulness, as it pictured forth the effects of successful guilt. The grave and masterly figure of Justice with which he solemnly closed his appeal to the judges of Mr. Hastings was, in my judgment, infinitely beyond the more theatrical images of Sheridan.

The constant demands of the House of Commons upon him occupied nearly all his time; and, however tempting

the reputation or the profits of the stage might be to a man of genius who had determined on political independence, however ill-inclined he might be to see his theatre in possession of any other comic writer, he could hardly hope for sufficient leisure to extend very considerably his own dramatic productions. He therefore listened with pleasure to the scheme of management proposed to him by Mr. Kemble; who, for a different reason, and with quite another sort of taste, was little disposed to encourage the modern drama. Bestowing a care so reverential upon the elder drama, and insuring its attraction by the expense with which it was embellished, made it almost an act of presumption in any writer of our own day to offer his inventions in the region devoted to the great masters of the art. The payments to authors, too, would be slender—who sometimes were well remunerated for a very fugitive production—while such moneys expended in dress and scenery and decoration remained permanent properties in the theatre, which, it has been already stated, had become rather mean in its imitations of the splendour of past times. The new manager, therefore, entered upon his task with full reliance upon his own plans; and little apprehensive, perhaps, then, that he should ever be thwarted in his designs, and reduced to besiege the treasury for the means of replenishing its own coffers. He started, however, with considerably more actual power than King had ever possessed, and his sister's strength might be calculated as his own.

In the early part of the summer of 1788 an event occurred of the deepest moment to the nation. I allude to the late King's alarming indisposition, of which the first symptoms indicated nothing beyond bilious fever; and accordingly Sir George Baker was inclined to keep his Majesty from the hurry to which he would be exposed by going to town, and recommended that he should remain at Kew until the complaint was quite removed. His Majesty's physicians, however, thought it advisable to try the effect of the mineral waters at Cheltenham: the King unfortunately derived little or no benefit from the springs, and returned on the 16th of August to Windsor. Soon after this symptoms of mental aberration appeared, which

called for the solemn attention of the legislature of the country.

The reason for noticing that event in this place is, that the subject of these *Memoirs* became among the very earliest to perceive that the royal mind was somewhat unsettled. The attention paid by his Majesty to the great actress was not confined to the public exhibition of her talents—he was a professed admirer of her manners in private life, and the Royal Family saw her frequently at Buckingham House and at Windsor.

His Majesty's conversation always expressed the gracious feeling of his mind, and his wish to promote the interests of herself and her family. However, on one occasion the King put into her hands a sheet of paper merely subscribed with his name, intended, it may be presumed, to afford the opportunity to Mrs. Siddons of pledging the royal signature to any provision of a pecuniary nature which might be most agreeable to the actress herself. This paper, with the discretion that was suited to the circumstance itself, and which was so characteristic of Mrs. Siddons, she, I was assured, delivered into the hand of the Queen, upon whom conduct so delicate and dignified was not likely to be lost.

Mr. Kemble, I think, told me that her Majesty was very pointed in the expression of her approbation at the time; and it may be readily believed that no individual among the various classes of the King's subjects looked with more solicitude to the progress of his Majesty's disorder, nor more sincerely rejoiced in his recovery, than the lady whom, even in his infirmity, he had intended to render as independent as she was meritorious.

On the 25th of November, 1788, in obedience, as we may state it, to the decision of Dr. Johnson, Mrs. Siddons acted Shakespeare's Queen Katharine in *Henry the Eighth*, which was carefully revived by Mr. Kemble, and became from that night one of the most attractive pieces that the stage has ever known. The character of Katharine is historical rather than dramatic—the poet has versified the chronicler, and has added but little, except the numbers of his art, to the very expressions of Henry's high-souled

Queen. I never on any occasion beheld our admirable actress more impressed with the matron dignity that was expected from her, and never were the highest hopes of her friends crowned with more perfect satisfaction. Yet there is but slender scope for passion. The situation absorbs the woman. The object of Katharine is to do nothing that may compromise her own rights or those of her daughter; nothing unworthy of the exalted stock she came from, or the high tone to which that birth had necessarily carried the sense of all her duties. Her place in council is admirably sustained; she is the soul of moderation—her candour pierces through the sophistry of exaggeration, and she looks with the keenness of an accusing angel into the oppressions of arrogant authority.

The first entrance of Mrs. Siddons was in the second scene of the first act. It is the council chamber, where the King appears to have been excited by Wolsey against the Duke of Buckingham, and they are upon the point of making his accuser repeat the treasons with which he has been charged, when Sir Henry Guildford without calls, 'Room for the Queen'—and she enters, her page bearing a cushion before her, which, having placed, she kneels to the King, and, after the salutations have been exchanged, proceeds to open the gracious object on which she came,—to relieve the commons from sundry grievous exactions, which she, in fact, charges upon Wolsey. The minister avails himself of the protest against more imputation than attaches to his mere voice in the measure of a Cabinet Council. 'I know but of a single part.' The temperate dignity of the reply was enchantingly uttered:—

'*Queen.* No, my lord,
You know no more than others; but you frame
Things, that are known alike.'

It was from that moment obvious that she would here excel any level speaking that she had ever delivered upon the stage. The dignity of her figure, admirably dressed, the intelligence of her look, and the graceful composure of her gesture have never been paralleled.

The first allusion to the Duke of Buckingham was the gentle concern of one who did not take accusation for

conviction. When the accuser adds to his charge of treason one that he vowed revenge upon the Cardinal, Wolsey presses that point stronger than a good or a great man would have done:—

> 'To your high person
> His will is most malignant; and it stretches
> Beyond you—to your friends.'

It is delightful to me to recall the tone of the Queen's rebuke:—

> '*Queen.* My learn'd lord cardinal,
> Deliver all with charity.'

As brave as generous, she follows this with a shuddering caution to the discarded servant who came forward to accuse his great master:—

> 'Take good heed
> You charge not in your spleen a noble person,
> And spoil your nobler soul; I say—take heed.'

The actress far outstripped here all the majestic energy which I have heard in the grandest court that ever assembled.[1] Upon Wolsey's triumph in the strength of the fellow's accusations, and his retort upon the Queen's lenity—equally beautiful was the 'Heaven mend all!' with which she concludes.

The scene in the second act, called her trial—a trial of nothing but the patience of the Queen—had the most intense interest; it was perfectly delusive. The address to the King made its way to the heart by satisfying the judgment. But upon Wolsey's insulting her with the 'integrity and learning' assembled to plead for her in the King's dominions against his own passions—the commanding air, look, and tone with which she called up her enemy excited a delightful astonishment. There is no hint in Shakespeare of any rising of Campeïus when she utters the words 'Lord Cardinal'; and then the waving him aside for the other Cardinal present, Wolsey—

> 'To you I speak.'

and I do not know whether this double action and division

[1] If the reader should suspect that I may here refer to the manner of Lord Thurlow, at the trial of Mr. Hastings in Westminster Hall, he will do me no injustice.

of the address originated with Mrs. Siddons or not. I incline to think it did; for though it looked more in the subtle style of her brother's understanding than what I will call the more manly plainness of her own, yet the action with which it was accompanied, the sway and balance of the figure, offered a charm to the spectator which the pencil fortunately did not lose; though my young friend who painted it perished from neglect when he was meditating greater things than what I call the most effective scene that was ever transferred from the stage to the canvas.

'My drops of tears
I'll turn to sparks of fire'—

expressions as vivid as the look of the actress by which that change was actually produced. The rest of this admirable scene was sustained with such true grandeur that upon her exit it was in truth quite time to break up the council, for the King and his favourite vindicated each other with very little attention from the audience.

Although we see nothing more of Katharine till she is at Kimbolton, and such is the rapid course of the action that Wolsey's disgrace, journey, and death all occur before the fourth act, yet the spectator is sufficiently led through the successive events, and attends the last illness of the Queen fully prepared for the awful close of her sublime character. The great woman whose progress I trace with equal veneration and regret (veneration for its powerful truth, and regret that it can be seen no more) acted this display of languor that never wearied with inimitable majesty. I can hardly bring myself to think the Lady Macbeth a greater effort: one more perfect I am sure it was not. The imagination will naturally let itself loose to consider what Shakespeare himself would have thought of such an exhibition. Though he wrote such characters for men, he must think of all the peculiar graces of woman; and for an elevated conception of female dignity he had only to contemplate the 'lion port and awe-commanding face' of Elizabeth, who had many of his plays acted at court. If the poet really designed to exhibit *Henry the Eighth* before Elizabeth, he must have greatly complimented her mind

when he trusted her with so fascinating a picture of the Queen supplanted by her own unfortunate mother. Yet the great Eliza is said to have shown a marked indifference to her mother's memory, and to have buried all the odious qualities of her father, and his injurious conduct to herself, under the flattering throne which she derived from him.

'O hard condition,
Twin-born with greatness!'

I cannot omit to notice the very characteristic manner in which the Defender of the Faith and author of its rejection was performed by Palmer; his towering figure, fair complexion, and explosive manner gave an absolute fac-simile of Harry. He had enough of tragedy about him to keep his comedy from being ludicrous: the importance of the King and the awe which it inspired have occasionally suffered in other hands.

The time of Wolsey was not yet arrived: Bensley was impressive, but he was so decided a mannerist that the Cardinal frequently reminded his hearers of the gallant conspirator against the State of Venice, and some violent anachronism seemed to have promoted the rebel Pierre from the wheel to the cross, which Wolsey, alas, proudly had borne before him.

As a matter of stage convenience Mr. Kemble joined the two characters of Cromwell and Griffith together; but the attachment of the former to his great master, Wolsey, would keep him at a great distance from the chance of ever attending Queen Katharine; he had his fortune to make at court, and knew well the peril of seeking those who are out of favour.

The 7th of February 1789 exhibited Mrs. Siddons as the Roman mother of Kemble in *Coriolanus*. Volumnia was evidently a great favourite with Shakespeare; he has painted that heroic mould in a manner the most natural and masterly. To use the language of another admirable writer, she has not parted with the 'remains of that fierce spirit which sullied with barbarism the lofty and romantic courtesy of ancient manners.' She delights to contemplate the warrior crimsoned in the blood of his enemy—sees his

mailed hand wiping his bleeding brows, and thinks that stain more becoming to a man than the golden lacquer upon his trophy. She does herself full justice too. She is a daughter of the Queen of Nations, and can speak thus truly to Coriolanus—

> 'Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me;
> But owe thy pride thyself.'

As I sat revolving the figure, the expression, and the voice of the noble representative of Volumnia—brought before my imagination again the simple resorts of head-dress by which her beautiful and noble face was made to pass for that of the mother of Kemble without demur—when, in running over, in a rather tenacious memory, the free and various dialogue in which she mingles, I had again in my ear the perfect tones of that eloquence always suited to the occasion—I could not help a smile of either contempt or pity at the affected disdain of La Harpe for everything that would have rendered his *Coriolan* natural and interesting. To hear him quote the dictum of his oracle, Voltaire—'that Coriolanus, condemned at Rome in the first act, received by the Volscians in the third, and besieging Rome in the fourth, constituted in fact three tragedies.' Then, to preserve any interest at all, feeling bold enough to venture so far from the unity of place as to open his own third act in the camp of the Volscians, being careful, however, in the scenery to show a miniature of Rome hanging up in the distance—as if, when he had once led his spectators from the place they were first shown, he might not as well have transferred them to Antium, better known to an audience by Shakespeare's exclamation—'A goodly city is this Antium'—than the minikin Rome in the distance could be from the camp of the Volscians.

I read over his character of Veturie, the mother of Coriolan, and rejoiced that Mrs. Siddons had been delivered from the sameness of her patriotic declamations, and the few points of stage trickery which are the only substitutes for the emotions of humanity. I will turn a few of these fine things into verse, at least as good as that they came from—

> '*Corio.* Your Roman firmness now must comfort you.
> *Vetur.* I am a mother only.

Corio. Nay, not now,
Since you have lost your son.
Vetur. How? I have lost him
Corio. So Rome decides. Is she not absolute?
Vetur. Can Rome efface that sacred character?
Corio. 'Twas of a Roman that you were the mother;—
And I am one no longer.
Vetur. Who? Marcius, thou!'

The climax of all this dovetailing absurdity is that Veturia has been fully informed of all that happened in the Forum before the entrance of Coriolanus, and her first speech to her son acquaints him that she has heard of his banishment; but the literary fencing match was to be played out all the same in this region of grandeur, and nature, and *bon sens*, and *bon goût*.

La Harpe was once accused of having trafficked a little with Shakespeare in his own third act; but the tutor of Alexander the Russ rather indignantly vindicated his good sense and good taste from such an aspersion by immediately quoting from 'Plutarque, Vertot, and Tite-Live'; from the first of whom Shakespeare had drawn the materials which had been common to them both.

I have never known why our great poet changed the name of Coriolanus's mother to that of his wife, namely, Volumnia, instead of Veturia, her real appellation. La Harpe informs us that an Abbé Abeille, in treating this subject, has knotted it all up into five acts of amorous intrigue, where Coriolanus and Aufidius play at cross purposes, or rather partners; the Roman being beloved by a certain Camilla, sister to Aufidius—he himself being a follower of Virgilia, who is beloved by Coriolanus. Here we have the name given by Shakespeare to the wife of the great patrician. Is it likely that this French bee had been buzzing among the sweets of Shakespeare, and brought away only the name of one of his flowrets instead of the honey?

I should quote the whole of the character of Volumnia were I to detail all the charms with which Siddons adorned her. Her playful courage with the women in the outset; the welcome of her son with the peculiar

'What is't? Coriolanus must I call thee?'

The scene after his contest with the tribunes, and that delightful—

'O, Sir, Sir, Sir,
I would have had you put your power well on,
Before you had worn it out.'

And the rejoinder, in the key of her son's 'Let them hang'—

'Ay, and burn too.'

The 'He must and will' go to the market place, and the relaxing of her maternal character into familiarity—

'Pr'ythee now, say you will, and go about it.'

and the moodiness with which she seemed to value his consent at nothing because it had been given with no greater readiness—

'Do your will.' [*Exit.*]

The remainder of Volumnia in the fifth act is highly characteristic as Shakespeare left it. Kemble admitted some of Thomson's dialogue in the French taste, *e.g.*—

'Rome by thy aid is sav'd—but thy son lost.'

To which the mother replies, as the whole parterre of Paris would have done,—

'He never can be lost who saves his country.'

But the greater poet had other arts of elevating a character than by making it the strutting declaimer of patriotic conundrums. Hear him, in the mouth of Coriolanus, unfold the great principle of filial duty to the mother who best of all the world deserved it:—

'*Col.* My mother bows;
As if Olympus to a molehill should
In supplication nod.'

How beautiful is the subsequent retort of Volumnia upon this feeling, as if she had heard him express it—

'There is no man in the world
More bound to his mother; yet here he lets me prate
Like one i' the stocks.'

and what follows in a strain of divine simplicity and pathos—

> 'When she, poor hen! fond of no second brood,
> Has cluck'd thee to the wars, and safely home.'

And equally great the reproach—

> 'This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;
> His wife is in Corioli, and his child
> Like him by chance.'

And the determination of the Roman matron, so suitable to her true dignity—

> 'I am hush'd until our city be on fire,
> And then I'll speak a little.'

When an author can write in this exquisitely natural strain, and almost forget himself and his luxuriant art to be the true organ only of character, passion, and business, he achieves the *ne ultra* of dramatic power, and holds up a mirror, stained by no mist of fashion, that clearly reflects the unquestionable features of man. To be worthy to study such a poet is no slight commendation—to display him, as Mrs. Siddons did his Lady Macbeth, Katharine, and Volumnia, is a fame that I have endeavoured at least to fix and delineate.

It is sometimes rather strange in the eye of the critic to see the possessor of the greatest talent disposed to waste it upon ungracious materials; and, in reviving the dead, stumbling upon subjects who were never worthy of existence. For her night, the 16th of February, Mrs. Siddons put up *The Law of Lombardy* and the farce of *Lethe*. This was what Cowper would have called

> 'Undesign'd severity, that glanc'd';

for the fine lady of the farce was as much forgotten as the princess of the tragedy. That Mrs. Clive might have exhibited Mrs. Riot, and delighted her audience, I can readily suppose; she might, not only with impunity, but with something like the vulgar ignorance of worn-out affectations, have uttered the jargon of Mrs. Malaprop. But

to hear from Mrs. Siddons of *Serbeerus* and *Plutus*, and the *internal* world—of *Goats* and *Vandils*, and of the waterman *Scarroon*, and of the *quincettence* and *emptity* of a fine lady, and her *anecdote* for the vapours—why truly one is hurt to think that such a man as Garrick should imagine he was doing anything when he wrote nonsense so detestable; and still more so that such a woman as Mrs. Siddons did not disdain to pollute her lips with language that disgraced her fine articulation as much as its meaning did her understanding. If she was not generous enough to stay away I suppose Mrs. Jordan might be the only person who could smile at such an attempt.

Lord Chalkstone and his Bowman are the first sketches of Ogleby and Canton, made out, as the painters say, by Colman the elder, and destined to the longest possible period of modern comedy—for our best are not, I think, immortal, like the comedies or tragedies of Shakespeare.

The subject of Mary Queen of Scots is so interesting in history, whatever be the opinions of the historian, that we are not surprised to see a tedious confinement, ended only by the axe, become the business of the tragic poet; and a single scene of interest, not very dramatic, be yet sufficient to render five acts endurable, though they should never be popular. The Duke of Wharton left an unfinished *Mary*; and Mr. St. John, the brother of Lord Viscount Bolingbroke, was fortunate enough to finish a tragedy upon that subject, which was produced in March 1789 by Mrs. Siddons, and, however feeble from the charms of the heroine and those of her representative, acted several times. The inherent difficulty of this story to an Englishman is the attention demanded by the rival Queens; and notwithstanding the solid quartos and the crowding octavos which encumber our shelves with her vindication, Mary of Scotland is not quite the person whom I should select to blight the fame of our glorious Elizabeth. If your pathos spring from the sufferings of the Scottish Queen, you can view in her rival little more than a vain and cruel persecutor; or a sovereign who, however arbitrary, in this case is the dupe of her ministers, and the innocent instrument by which the ruin of her dear kinswoman is

accomplished. But, however congested, it will always be heavy in the performance, unless the piece be animated by scenes of that courtly Billingsgate with which Schiller has marked the interview of his Mary and Elizabeth. I still think that the poet who could read German and write English might give a version of his play that would live; but then it should be no affair of patchwork, no mosaic from Banks and St. John, and scraps collected from 'all simples that have virtue under the moon'; but what the author of *The Robbers* and *Don Carlos* has done with the subject—apologising in some degree for his freedom as to the facts, and his foreign view of the whole business.

Our great actress has been alluded to as slightly connected with the commencement of his Majesty's indisposition. She now very willingly lent herself and her talents to the celebration of his recovery. The disappointment of Opposition, so near the possession of political power as to anticipate appointments and bestow bishoprics, was presumed to have forgotten itself in the general joy occasioned by the King's restoration to perfect health. The predictions as to his Majesty's displeasure at certain provisions of Mr. Pitt were answered by the contrary expressions of entire satisfaction and augmented confidence, and the Minister was preserved for the mighty task of resisting the revolutionary power of France. But the club at Brookes's could not submit to lag behind in the festivities of the Metropolis; and they gave a promenade, with a concert and recitation, supper and ball, and so on, to the ladies in the Opera House—fitted up superbly for the occasion. Mrs. Siddons, I think, idly condescended to be dressed as Britannia, and recited an ode written in the gossamer style of Della Crusca Merry, with all the fiction at least of the truest poetry; for he was a furious zealot for liberty, and was at length hurried on to be the eulogist at least of actions which will render in future times the veracity of the historian suspected. That decided cant which, by its vehement longings for the preservation of freedom, implies that it is considered to be in danger, was not spared. We had, in compliment to his Majesty's recovery, 'Long may he rule a willing land,'

followed immediately by the check to inconsiderate loyalty—

'But, oh! for ever may that land be free!'

Yet occasionally the poet wandered into thinner air than the atmosphere of politics; and having sounded the inspiring union of George and Liberty! he immediately invokes the fairies:—

'Fairy people! ye who dwell
In fragrant evening's vapoury cell,
To the clear moon oft repair.'

They who have beheld the graceful form of Mrs. Siddons, and heard the solemn and melodious dignity of her declamation, may fancy the effect of such fine writing from her mouth, and imagine the astonishment of the spectators when, having finished the ode, she sat down in the exact attitude of Britannia as impressed upon our copper coin.

With the policy which the best taste is pardonable for exercising as to a benefit night, Mrs. Siddons repeated this ode on the 11th of May at Drury Lane Theatre, after acting Juliet, which, I think, never became one of her current parts. The passion of *Romeo and Juliet* is entirely without dignity: it springs up, like the mushroom, in a night, and its flavour is earthy. To speak without a figure, there is no mind in it; family interests it opposes, and the first glance on both sides renders it irresistible. It is adorned by all the magic of Shakespeare's fancy, and the play is consequently the text-book of our English lovers before the years of discretion. It is afterwards, I believe, deemed childish, and the actual age of the lovely Italian is thought the best justification of her vehemence and folly. There is, therefore, much to be visually surmounted before the sage and sober character of the Siddonian countenance can be received as the expression of enthusiastic and unreflecting passion; or rather the face indicated more mind than is found in the character of Juliet.

But the art of the great actress made a powerful struggle against her natural strength; and so much of seeming artlessness was assumed, and so delightfully was the language modulated, that at times the ascendency of the

mother and the nurse did not seem preposterous and incredible.

The acting play has carefully expunged the traces of Romeo's previous passion for Rosaline;[1] so that the lovers seem predestined to complete each other's misery, and exist only for that love which destroys them. The German taste has found a vast deal of mysticism in the devotion of our lovers, and much of the 'unintelligible world' is, no doubt, faithfully described by those bulky 'couriers of the air.' Our duller imaginations see nothing but a disastrous and juvenile passion, an attraction of the exterior alone; where, beauty being found, the higher requisites are overlooked, or rather presumed to be the necessary inhabitants of a graceful structure.

Mrs. Siddons was now in the 'mid season of this mortal life,' and therefore numbered twenty years more than the fond enthusiast of Verona. Her beauty was of that kind to which time adds strength without much diminishing sweetness. Her art had more impressed her features than her age. The agonising calls upon their expression had compelled the muscles into powerful action; and however they might be composed under the control of the great magician, yet the countenance was too strong for Juliet. The eye, however, perfectly answered the mind; and what is or can be so essential to an actress as this visual eloquence?

Had Mr. Garrick, as her first appearance in London, brought her out in Juliet, the winning gentleness of her first scenes, contrasting with the ardent affection and speaking terrors of the latter, must have established her at once; but he chose to retain her as of counsel in the matter of

[1] In Shakespeare, Rosaline was to be a guest at Capulet's feast, and it was precisely to work at least a comparative cure of his passion for her that his friend Benvolio would have him go thither. Romeo is too confident of his steadiness, and perishes by the bright ordeal he provokes. Yet Rosaline is not named by them at the banquet, and the first glance at Juliet dispels a passion esteemed by him who entertains it incapable of change—

> 'When the devout religion of mine eye
> Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires!'

As Rosaline had never heard even of his passion, the punishment of his facility is rather severe.

Shylock *versus* Antonio, and exhibited as an eloquent pleader what should have been the undisguised organ of the most intense feelings of her sex.

When such an actor as Mr. Garrick had determined upon acting Romeo himself, it would follow as a branch of his own success to render the performance of Juliet as perfect as the most scrupulous attention to his fair partner could make it. The reciprocation of looks, the combinations of attitude, the meaning of every line, the quality of every sound, were to be in the most exact unison, or one of the characters must suffer from the other. It was not likely, therefore, that he should leave any very striking novelties to even the genius of Mrs. Siddons. I think upon the whole that she stood pretty much upon the former level of Juliet, except that in the balcony there was more perfect utterance, by which I mean that the sense came fuller upon the ear; and in the humouring of the nurse there was something of a more genuine playfulness than I had heard before; as in the alarming scene of lonely midnight meditation the tragic force of the great heroine rendered all competition hopeless.

There is something in the scene of Juliet's grave greatly at variance with the text, and with propriety itself. We have a churchyard, and in it the monument of the Capulets. 'Why I descend into this bed of death' is the expression of Romeo, who yet does not descend at all. He is furnished with a wrenching iron which would enable him, by a proper application of his force, to remove the covering of the vault, and thus put it in his power to descend into the spacious receptacle

> 'Where for these many hundred years, the bones
> Of all the buried [Capulets] are pack'd.'

But our stage Romeo batters a couple of doors fiercely with the crow in his grasp, which very naturally fly open outwards; and there, in all her supposed 'maiden strewments,' lies Juliet, above ground, ingeniously obvious to the audience. Surely all this is grossly absurd, and a more creditable piece of machinery should now triumph over the early poverty of scenical arrangement. It would clearly be

better if Romeo descended into the monument and bore Juliet in his arms to revisit the glimpses of the moon; a far more natural arrangement, and in which Herculean labour he might receive invisible assistance from an ascending trap within the monument. However, the start when she is discovered is a fine thing; the whirling of the iron crow is another fine thing; and to hear the clapping from the gallery at such a moment must greatly delight the actor and actress, who are disposed in attitudes so strikingly picturesque.

I know the change made in the very action itself, and certainly do not regret that Juliet wakes before Romeo expires, because it affords a scene of exquisite emotion; but it should be consistently arranged. Romeo bears her from the tomb, and yet two speeches afterwards she is in the vault of death, which the mere churchyard cannot be called. The dreadful mining company of undertakers must settle this uncommon disinterment. I profess my inability. When I said that the scene now given is one of great emotion, I must not be supposed to mean more than that the incident itself is deeply affecting. It is very meanly written, when compared with the language of Shakespeare. The first hint of Juliet's waking before Romeo expires is from Otway, who has transformed our poet's lovers into Marcius and Lavinia; but he could lend little to the scene before us. Strange as it may sound, even Otway here has no passion—it is the strain of puerility. The modern scene consists, therefore, of odds and ends, the 'perfume and suppliance of an actor's memory,' not the genuine language of the situation and the passion. Snatches of *The Mourning Bride* may be perceived, besides the miserable cant of—

> 'Twixt death and love I 'm torn, I am distracted';

and the infantine allusion—

> 'Fathers have flinty hearts, no tears can melt 'em:
> Nature pleads in vain: children must be wretched.'

As to the exclamations of Juliet, I will not be so rude as to question their propriety. But thus it is, if any improve-

ment of Shakespeare's interest is suggested, the frigid common-place in which it must be written, or is written, would lead us almost to the belief that the poet had breathed one common curse against the disturbers of any of his remains. See the lines over his grave at Stratford.

CHAPTER XIX

It was natural to expect that the management of Mr. Kemble would have greatly strengthened the stage consequence of Mrs. Siddons; but certainly the reverse was the fact, and the second season of it saw her leave London for a tour both friendly and professional. If I have leave to blame in such a matter, I rather incline to think my late friend somewhat disposed, at that time, to build too strongly on his own resources; or at least to have been too attentive to the idle clamour relative to the family interests, and therefore disposed to allow his sister to demonstrate her value by her absence. I may have neglected to note down some still better reasons alleged at the time, but it was in truth a bold step to permit any one season to be divested of its greatest ornament; and I am apt to suspect some slight misunderstanding to have been at the bottom of her temporary secession. She was happily secure in the actual transcendency of her talent; and as one prodigy was dramatically sufficient for those times, she ran no risk whatever in the experiment. On the score of novelty she lost nothing; tragic composition was at a very low ebb among us; and indeed, since then, the only high tides we have experienced have been forced by the heavy swells of the German Ocean.

I have not continued a comparative estimate of the attraction of Mrs. Siddons in her old characters; but for many years Isabella, the first she acted of her brilliant period, continued to be most frequently repeated; and I must so far think the preference a just one, that I am quite sure I saw it myself oftener than any of the powerful list,

those of Shakespeare only excepted, in which the attraction was not entirely her own. Nor did she experience the slightest failure of patronage; on her own night, in the season of 1790-91, she had £412 in the house to *The Gamester*. That house, it will be remembered, was Garrick's, and this was the year of its condemnation. We shall next survey Mrs. Siddons acting upon a larger stage, and attend to the alteration in some degree of her style of action, which, moving in a greater space, certainly became more grand and imposing.

In the year 1792 this experiment of her powers upon a stage constructed for Italian opera and ballet was made, and succeeded almost beyond expectation. That the spectators in the front of the house lost much of her expression I know, though I seldom sat there; for the passage between the orchestra and the pit had a very comfortable seat for about thirty amateurs of the art, and, with a little activity and address, it was never very difficult to obtain a place there. And from this situation, in all her towering majesty of person, and in the maturity of her excellence, I received impressions which I could never consent to lose, and which have certainly not been endangered by any effects from succeeding performers.

But I have hinted at some change of style, the result of the new sphere of exertion. There is nothing in Italian opera that requires very extraordinary width of stage. It must, therefore, have been suggested by a numerous *corps de ballet*, which covers the whole proscenium. The side scenes are at a great distance from the front of the stage. In the Italian opera, after the singer, male or female, has finished the usual colloquy with the prompter behind the central hood which conceals his occiput, though not his tongue, from the visitors, the usual mode is to turn short round, and, presenting the back view to their admirers, with the arms raised, somewhat in the figure of a candlestick with two branches, to walk away rather rapidly, without the smallest grace, and if any applause should pursue their march, or has attended their music, to make a bow or curtsey at the wing, and hurry off to the fireside. But either the entrance or exit of English tragedy is a matter

that must be somewhat closer in its bearing upon the business of the scene.

So few English performers are ever perfectly at their ease upon the stage, that the springing off with a glance at the pit, if it were not thought energetic, would be chosen from nervous impatience at supporting the gaze of thousands while the performer merely walks away. All the rhymed couplets to carry them off with effect attest the misery of departure; and the speaking a few words as entering also shows the desire to come into as speedy a commerce with the audience as can possibly be achieved.

The amazing self-possession of Mrs. Siddons rendered distance only the means of displaying a system of graceful and considerate dignity, or weighty and lingering affliction, as the case might demand. In the hurry of distraction she could stop, and in some frenzied attitude speak wonders to the eye, till a second rush forward brought her to the proper ground on which her utterance might be trusted. I will not be so ungallant as to ascribe the composure of this grand woman to any vain complacency in her majestic form. By thinking so I should ill repay that artist-like admiration with which I always beheld it. No; I believe she thought at such moments only of the character and the support it demanded from her of every kind. When Mrs. Siddons quitted her dressing-room I believe she left there the last thought about herself. Never did I see her eye wander from the business of the scene—no recognisance of the most noble of her friends exchanged the character for the individual. In this duty her brother would frequently fail; and he seemed to take a delight in showing how absolute a mastery he possessed—that he could make a sign and sometimes speak to a friend near him, and yet seem to carry on the action and the look of the character. I never saw this in his sister—no, not for a moment. It was this devotion to what she was about that left so little inequality in her numerous repetitions of the same part. Kemble, to use the extravagant opposition of one of Dr. Young's figures, in acting was a 'worm or a god.' He walked or dozed through the character, or sublimed it with energy and grace. Constitutional infirmity,

cough, and the opium he used to quiet it are to account for this—we had often to regret it. But I never saw an indifferent performance from Siddons, though I may have witnessed a cold or a noisy audience. The uniform temperance of female life had its share in the conservation of this fulness of power; but no domestic life is without its own cares, vexations, or sorrows, and the admirable art by which their effects were suspended for the duties of profession shows a mental firmness of the highest value.

Conspiring with the larger stage to produce some change in her style was her delight in statuary, which directed her attention to the antique, and made a remarkable impression upon her as to simplicity of attire and severity of attitude. The actress had formerly complied with fashion, and deemed the prevalent becoming; she now saw that tragedy was debased by the flutter of light materials, and that the head, and all its powerful action from the shoulder, should never be encumbered by the monstrous inventions of the hairdresser and the milliner. She was now, therefore, prepared to introduce a mode of stage decoration and of deportment parting from one common principle, itself originating with a people qualified to legislate even in taste itself. What, however, began in good sense, deciding among the forms of grace and beauty, was, by political mania in the rival nation, carried into the excess of shameless indecency. France soon sent us over her amazons to burlesque all classical costume, and her models were received among us with unaffected disgust. What Mrs. Siddons had chosen remains in a great degree the standard of female costume to the present hour; and any little excesses by degrees dropped off, and left our ladies the heirs of her taste and its inseparable modesty. I have said that her deportment now varied considerably; and I have no doubt of the fact. In a small space the turns are quick and short. Where the area is considerable the step is wider, the figure more erect, and the whole progress more grand and powerful; the action is more from the shoulder, and we now first began to hear of the perfect form of Mrs. Siddons's arm. Her walk has never been attempted by any

other actress, and in deliberate dignity was as much alone as the expression of her countenance.

In point of scenery little could be done at the Opera-house for the accommodation of the English drama; and the small flats of Drury Lane were lost under a roof so towering. But neither tragedy nor comedy ever seemed with me to derive a benefit proportioned to the pains that have been taken in the scenic department of our stages. When the scenes are first drawn on, or the roller descends, the work exhibited is considered a few moments as a work of art; the persons who move before it then engross the attention; at their exit it is raised or drawn off and is speedily forgotten, or seen with indifference the second time. If the perspective as to the actor standing in front of the scene was so accurate that the whole effect should be delusive, and the impression be of actual sky and land and building (though an objection will always remain to the abrupt junction of the borders with the tops of the scenes, the wings, and the scoring line where the flats meet each other, the grooves in which they move, the boarded stage, and other difficulties hitherto insurmountable), I could understand the object of those who expend so much money on their elaboration; but I confess I am of opinion that they should never do more than suggest to the imagination; and that it would not be desirable that the spectator should lose his senses to the point of forgetting that he is in a regular theatre, and enjoying a work of art invented for his amusement and his instruction by a poet, and acted by another artist of corresponding talent called a player. All beyond this is the dream of ignorance and inexperience.

I have already hinted at my impression that the powers of the truly great comedian, using the term to express an actor of either species of the drama, are superior to all this aid; his commerce is with the judgment and the passions: it is vitality operating upon kindred life—man awaking the sympathies of man. When we have such a being as Mrs. Siddons before us in Lady Macbeth, what signifies the order or disorder of the picture of a castle behind her, or whether the shadows lie upwards or downwards on the mouldings of a midnight apartment? It is to the terror of

her eye; it is to the vehement and commanding sweep of her action; it is to the perfection of her voice that I am a captive, and I must pity the man who, not being the painter of the canvas, is at leisure to inquire how it is executed.

The historian of the stage is but seldom called to notice any glaring offence against public decorum. Managers sympathise for the most part with the public feeling, and are always alive to their own interest. I leave the following mistake upon record. The second or Legislative Assembly of France, in the month of December 1791, had determined upon war with the military powers on the Continent. 'Louis the Sixteenth was affirmed to be at the head of an Austrian committee in the Tuileries. A hundred thousand Frenchmen, brave and well armed,

"Longing wait the signal to attack."

The English Government can only strike at a distance, while the people of England will offer up prayers for the success which they know will one day be their own.'

In the face of this wicked libel, read, with whatever feelings, in all the coffee-houses and most of the respectable dwellings in London, a day recurs which reminds all but savages of the grand rebellion in this country and the mock trial of its sovereign, and his public execution on the 30th of January. A venerable custom of long standing had kept this day as one of fast and humiliation. If our Church contained within its priesthood any peculiar powers of oratory, that theme was treated by them before our two Houses of Parliament, and the public demonstration of concern for the errors of the last century almost guaranteed the land from any renewal of such horrors here, or the slightest countenance to their recurrence elsewhere.

The Theatre Royal of Drury Lane, boasting occasionally the presence of his Majesty and his august family within its walls, on the 30th of January 1792 selected for the amusements of the evening the buffooneries of *Cymon*, with the farce of *The Devil to Pay*. Could any conduct be more likely to continue the miserable dupes of Paris in the opinion which I have just quoted? Could they fail to

hurry forward the steps on their side the water which led to a similar catastrophe, to be treated by themselves with even superior scorn, contempt, or derision? See, they would say, how a theatre, under the direction of the accomplished Sheridan, the friend of man, respects the feelings of loyalty still lingering in a few of the privileged orders. The proceeding is of no more moment in England now than it was in 1649, when the friends of equality who signed the sentence for Charles's execution were so sportive as to ink each other's fingers by drawing through them that pen which decreed the sovereignty of the people.

Mrs. Siddons opened her season of 1792 with *Isabella*, and on the 7th of February acted what is called Queen Elizabeth in *Richard the Third*—a character helpless, facile, and lachrymose, a victim and a plaything to the active villainy of the tyrant. In Mrs. Siddons's situation she should have refused the part. Had I been in her brother's I would not have asked her to perform it. I fancy he caught at the strength which her name would give to the play-bill, without reflecting that her attraction was weakened by applying her talent to matter unworthy of it. When a really great actress is in a theatre her name should be the signal of delight. Even novelties should be sparingly graced by her performances, and they should possess unquestioned merit. If the art of the actress could produce great effects with slender materials, she should not be permitted to bear down true taste and judgment; the lips of Mrs. Siddons should be devoted to the purest strains of dramatic poesy.

On the 26th of March, after her sublime impersonation of Queen Katharine in *Henry the Eighth*, she indulged her friends with a recitation of Collins's *Ode on the Passions*. This was a composition for music, and it could not well have better than the voice of Mrs. Siddons. She was in truth the organ of passion; but the poet here describes the passion by its sympathies with particular scenes in nature, and its characteristic expression when fully displayed. The human form under its influence is given as the symbol of the passion. The actress who described the character lent in a great degree her countenance and her gesture as aids

to the beautiful imagery of the poet. This is unavoidable in all stage recitation, and criticism must not proudly reject the living commentary upon language, however forcible.

The pictures of Hope, Revenge, Melancholy, Cheerfulness, and Joy admit easily of this impersonation—they are drawn at length, and are extremely vivid. Fear is very slightly touched indeed compared with the ode on the subject by the same lovely poet. Pity might easily be improved by some delightful illustrations from the author's ode to a kindred being, Mercy. Such for instance as the following:—

> 'When he whom even our joys provoke,
> The fiend of nature, join'd his yoke,
> And rush'd in wrath to make our isle his prey;
> Thy form, from out thy sweet abode,
> O'ertook him on his blasted road,
> And stopp'd his wheels and look'd his rage away.'

Jealousy is only described by its vacillation; and Love is wantoning in her beauty, with zone unbound and tresses floating in the dance of Joy, instead of exerting her mighty influence over the mind, swelling it to rapture and delighting even by its agonies.

On the 28th of April Mrs. Siddons performed the Jealous Wife—a character, for whatever reason, devoted to comedy, though I have often tried to conceive a tragic exhibition of female jealousy that should produce a character for the actress equal in its effects to the noble Moor. But, alas! invent what you might of interest or delusive appearance, the mind of Shakespeare would be still required to fill up the outline with natural thought and its expression.

> 'Such bliss to one alone
> Of all the sons of soul was known.'

I look, however, upon Mr. Colman's *Jealous Wife* to be a *chef-d'œuvre* of comedy, and, though unsupported by wit, to have a power of truth and neatness which he never afterwards fully equalled. Mrs. Oakley is an object of sincere pity. She never loses the respect of those who witness the self-tormentress. Murphy, after his French model, ran his

Lady Restless down into farce. To this level it always hurt me to see Mrs. Siddons descend.

The original cast of *The Jealous Wife*—I mean as to its principal parts—it may be proper to notice upon the present occasion. Garrick himself kindly acted Mr. Oakley, though not of that importance to himself which might have been wished. Yates, an admirable actor, performed the Major; King, Sir Harry Beagle; and the accomplished O'Brien, Lord Trinket; Mrs. Pritchard the Jealous Wife; and the Clive that *insouciante* profligate woman of *bon ton* transferred from Fielding, and by her 'new possessor' called Lady Freelove.

Kemble was the Oakley of the revival, and Palmer, who had been the original Charles, was become by time a very whimsical Major, and really enjoyed the extreme indulgence of his brother. Mrs. Pritchard was before my time. She was, it seems, one of those prodigies whom the stage inspires with elegance, taste, and correctness which she never had, or affected to despise, in private life—a dangerous trick, if it be one, or a miraculous change without an adequate cause. Faulty pronunciation has adhered in my own time to many performers of both sexes and of great excellence, and the knowledge has exceeded the practice. But vulgarity in utterance is itself a debasing thing, and is but indifferently palliated by either the toilet or the dancing master.

I have never been strongly tempted by the comedy of either Mrs. Siddons or her late brother; but her Mrs. Oakley was certainly the perfect representation of a sensible but jealous woman. She seemed to plunge into her mistakes with great ease and nature; and the scene of simulation in the second act, where she enters with good-humour into the feelings of her husband for Charles, in order to extract from him all that he knows relative to the object of her jealousy—the returning fiend and the exclamation 'Amazing!' which lets him see that he has been only feeding the flame while he thought he was quenching the fire—all was as perfect, I think, as her tragedy itself. The comic scene, where Mrs. Oakley falls into practised fits as a mode of alarming humanity, if love should be tired out, I

hope is a libel upon the ladies. However, I perfectly approve of the remedy if you are sure of the distemper. But nothing gave me higher gratification than to observe in that most expressive of faces the dawning of conviction that she had been imposing upon herself, and the growing effects of irresistible evidence reducing her to shame for her violence, and apprehension that she may have trifled with love till it is lost. What security Oakley has against the return of a malady seemingly constitutional the spectator may fancy for himself, but I believe the only moral Proteus is the last act of a comedy.

Colman's friend, Lloyd, wrote an excellent prologue to this play, the last couplet of which he remembered when he introduced his most entertaining son to the public as an author in the year 1784—

> Do justice on him ! as on fools before,
> And give to blockheads past one blockhead more.'

When Mr. Colman, after the prefatory 'if,' directed the audience to damn him for 'a chip of the old block,' he in fact invited them to applaud a son worthy of the author of *The Jealous Wife*, *The Clandestine Marriage*, and the English Terence. To think of such men is the charm of existence and the consolation of old age.

That very clever artist (for his invention was nothing), Murphy, in the summer of 1783, had been so much struck by the talents of Mrs. Siddons, that he resolved to write a tragedy expressly for her. The subject appears to have been suggested to him by Madame de Sévigné's mention of the success of La Champmêlée in the younger Corneille's *Ariane*, performed in the beginning of the year 1672.

After a careful perusal of the French and English Ariadnes, I have not a moment's hesitation in preferring Corneille to Murphy. The latter has made more bustle without more actual business, and in his attempt to raise the diction, which Voltaire found often prosaic, he has robbed it of that truth of sentiment and almost colloquial expression by which, spoken as naturally as written, La Champmêlée was enabled to 'interest every heart, and leave every eye dissolved in tears.'

But by raising the diction Voltaire did not mean cramming it with figures, and talking

> 'In a high strutting style of the stars,
> The eagle of Jove, and the chariot of Mars.'

When in Murphy's second act the back scene opens and soft music is heard (the minuet in *Ariadne*); when Ariadne advances with a train of virgins, like Elfrida in *Caractacus*, and speaks her very language; when she pours out a most unnatural rhapsody upon the sun coming to quell the howling blast, and the circling hours with blessings on their wings, and bright hope and rose-lipped health, and pure delight and love and joy, nothing is gained by such trash to the author, and the actress is destroyed by it. But hear the candid confession of Voltaire as to Corneille's language. 'Ce sont là' (the third scene of his fifth act) 'de ces vers que la situation seule rend excellents; les moindres ornements les affaibliraient; c'est un très grand mérite: tant il est vrai que le naturel est toujours ce qui plaît le plus.' And in another place, of four lines spoken by Ariane relative to her sister Phedra: 'See,' says he, 'how in these four lines everything is natural and easy, no unnecessary word, nor any one out of its proper place.'

It should, in passing, be observed, to the credit of the French actress, that though Racine was her lover, yet in the case of the Corneilles she never sacrificed her professional duty to her personal attachments. She rendered the Ariane exquisitely touching and tenderly triumphant, though everything besides in the play was mean and worthless, and almost risible. The King of Naxos is an amorous cypher, Theseus and Pirithous creeping scoundrels, and Phedra a perfidious and unnatural sister; all of whom might with true poetical justice be turned loose in the Cretan labyrinth, without the clue to guide them from the tyranny of Minos.

Murphy has left Phedra as bad as he found her. Pirithous he has made at least a gentleman, and so far improved the play; but the poniard, that wretched executioner of all English tragedies, should have been spared, upon the precedent supplied by Corneille. My old friend did not bring out his play in 1784, highly as he thought of Mrs.

Siddons, 'because,' as he says, 'a play that might linger nine nights upon the stage was not the object of the author's ambition'; he therefore kept his piece by him nine years, and in 1793 it was acted six times, and no more. But it must not be concealed, our mixed English audiences have very few favourites among the personages of antiquity, and the few they have hold rather by prescription than fondness. The Roman part of them make their fortune among us by high and swelling sentiments of liberty, or a grand and ostentatious courage. Theseus and Ariadne might linger formerly upon our tapestry—their last retreat. The skill of the artists may be questionable as to either design or execution, but that our poets could at least furnish splendid hints of this very subject we may know by that exquisite instruction to the needle given by Aspatia in *The Maid's Tragedy*:—

> 'Suppose I stand upon the sea-beach now,
> Mine arms thus, and mine hair blown by the wind,
> Wild as the desert; and let all about me
> Tell that I am forsaken. Make me look
> Like Sorrow's monument, and the trees about me
> Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks
> Groan with continual surges; and, behind me,
> Make all a desolation.'

This and every collateral aid Mrs. Siddons availed herself of in the conception of Ariadne; but the truth is, the scenes were repetitions of each other; and the heroine could only rave of the perfidy of Theseus; and either he, or Pirithous, or her sister, could do no more than incessantly remind her that, since his affections had another object, she could not do better than change also, and marry the doating King of Naxos. Incidents so meagre, worn to the very bone through five long acts, even Mrs. Siddons could not render interesting; passages there were occasionally of great force—but the tears did not flow, as they did at the simpler style of Corneille; and all the turgid efforts of the English poet only battered the ear, and left the heart in a state of repose unnatural to the subject.

Thus (a hard fate) the novelties of her own day did nothing for the fame of the actress.

Mrs. Siddons, on the 21st of April, 1794, had the

satisfaction of opening with her Lady Macbeth the new Theatre of Drury Lane, erected by Mr. Holland, and, in my opinion, the most chaste and beautiful structure that ever bore the name. It was on this occasion that Mr. Kemble, on the authority of the poet Lloyd, permitted himself, against the declared intention of Shakespeare, to banish the ghost of Banquo. If there resulted from the language no sort of ambiguity—if Macbeth named Banquo when he started at vacancy—despising all the philosophy of such disorders, I should prefer being visibly made acquainted with the object of his terrors to all that speech could do for the patron of this extensive imagination.

It is thus that Lloyd expresses himself in *The Actor*—

> 'Why need the ghost usurp the monarch's place,
> To frighten children with his mealy face?
> The King alone should form the phantom there,
> And talk and tremble at the empty chair.'

I have nothing whatever to combat where it is ludicrously done. If we are to have Banquo close to the eye, dressed like Guy Faux himself, and becoming a chair no better, the matter is soon determined; but it might unquestionably be rendered both picturesque and terrible. In a former work I have reasoned upon the stage direction still remaining in the only copy of *Macbeth*, and no doubt proceeding from the pen of Shakespeare himself. But the subject has all along been argued as if the appearance of Banquo was only a visual sign to the spectators of the object of Macbeth's imagination. This is no true account of the matter. Macbeth's mind is not in a situation to shape ideal terrors; the destruction of his enemy, the grown serpent, had such charms for him as to render him ten times himself; and the worm that fled annoys him only with the prospect of venom to be bred at a future time. He is so much at his ease as even to finesse upon the subject, and express an anxious wish for the presence of Banquo at the banquet, to which he was invited, and which he would have graced but for the treacherous assassination which cut him off in sight of the illuminated hall of festivity. At this moment, to confound his hypocrisy and torture his guilt, the spirit of his murdered friend, availing himself of the power to become

visible to one[1] only of a mixed assembly, arrayed in all his terrors ascends the royal seat, the living presentment of that body which, with twenty trenched gashes about it, safely, as Macbeth supposes, bides in a neighbouring ditch. It is thus that the ghost of Denmark chooses to revisit his son in the closet of the Queen, visible and audible to him alone; his wretched mother seeing nothing of that 'gracious figure,' nor hearing one syllable even of the tender admonition to Hamlet in her own favour:—

> 'Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother aught. Leave her to Heaven.'

I have known few sounder thinkers than my late friend Opie, and he was highly indignant at the innovation in question. In the kindred art Sir Joshua Reynolds had been arraigned for introducing the 'busy meddling fiend' behind the pillow of his dying Cardinal. Mr. Opie went a little out of his way to have the pleasure of noticing the effect of similar criticism applied to the designs of Shakespeare. I take the liberty of quoting his own expression, which was always masterly:—

'I know of no one who has availed himself of poetic licence with more address than Sir Joshua Reynolds in his celebrated picture of the death of Cardinal Beaufort, painted for the Shakespeare Gallery. The varied beauties of this work might well employ a great part of a lecture; but, at present, I shall pass them over, and attend only to what relates immediately to the question before us, the effect of the visionary devil, couched close, and listening eagerly behind the pillow of the dying wretch, which not only invigorates and clothes the subject in its appropriate interest and terror, but immediately clears up all ambiguity, by informing us that those are not bodily sufferings which we behold so forcibly delineated, that they are not merely the pangs of death which make him grin, but that his agony proceeds from those daggers of the mind, the overwhelming horrors

[1] Let us take our faith in this matter from Prospero himself—

> 'Be subject to no sight but thine and mine:
> Invisible to every eyeball else.'
> *Tempest.*

of a guilty and awakened conscience. This was the point on which rested the whole moral effect of the piece; it was absolutely necessary to be understood, and could by no other means have been so strongly and perspicuously expressed.' He then, in his forcible manner, ridicules the objectors to this mode of treating the subject, and proceeds thus:—

'Of the same class were those who of late endeavoured to rob the play of *Macbeth* of the resurrection of Banquo's ghost to fill the chair of the murderer. Happily, however, for the true lovers of Shakespeare, the genuine feelings of the public have decided against this most barbarous mutilation.'

That Shakespeare believed such an appearance possible there can be little question. He knew the distinction between 'he thinks he sees him' and he 'knows he sees him'—between 'thick-coming fancies' and preternatural realities; and such is either the truth of tradition upon this subject, or the tendency of our common nature to credit such an occurrence, that, let the sturdiest of the sect, the best satisfied that 'nothing but substance can be an object of vision,' consider the subject alone, in profound silence, and at the midnight hour; and if he makes a faithful report of his condition, his startled senses will confess the invincible superstition of his feelings, if he will not allow the term to be fairly applicable to his understanding.

In point of size and even splendour, the Apollo Drury did not equal the Opera House, a structure intended more particularly for the display of beauty in higher life, and the best part of whose exhibition is certainly before the curtain. But it was admirably adapted to all the purposes of playing, and could even conveniently admit within its walls a nightly receipt of £700. Nor did it look deserted on a thin night. So judiciously was its front decorated that the visitors saw well and were well seen, and as to numbers the house appeared respectable when the attraction fell off.

As to the general perfection of the stage of this theatre, nothing had ever among us, in thought, approached it. Everything that machinery could accomplish was put

within the grasp of the proprietors; the scenery rose from below the stage or descended thither, and was in itself vast and beautiful; and a wardrobe was absolutely necessary of more than common or o'er-dyed materials, not to disgrace this palace of Eastern magnificence. One might have been tempted to fancy that the eloquent prosecutor of Mr. Hastings had raised his triumphant theatre out of the divided spoils of the Governor-General of India.

Mrs. Siddons on this first appearance in the new theatre would have been more than human if she had not exulted. It was unquestionably the finest in Europe; and the conduct of it, and its main support, certainly in her own family. As to the property itself, I am very sure that they grasped it in imagination. So devoted to politics as Mr. Sheridan seemed, it might look more than a remote probability that he would one day take office with his party; and that a theatre and its concerns must be resigned to the more urgent claims of official dignity and business. At such a time a sale might take place upon liberal and easy terms, and the influence of Mr. Sheridan upon the fashionable world continue a marked preference to a theatre of which he had been the proprietor and was still the guardian. On this night of opening the Kemble family took a new hold upon the theatre and the town by producing Mr. Charles Kemble, then a youth of eighteen, in the character of Malcolm. His excellent brother was in this and every other part of his conduct to him judicious as well as kind. In my life of Mr. Kemble I have recorded his private opinion of the powers he discovered; and he snatched him from envy, as well as intoxicating vanity, by allotting to him a range of pleasing but not important characters, from which he was to lift himself by his talents, rather than succeed to better as a birthright.

As it can form no part of my plan, however I may respect him, to pursue him step by step to his present confirmed rank in the profession, I may be indulged in a summary, but I hope a distinct, sketch of this most elegant actor, in which I shall not disguise his difficulties, because they must be weighed in order fully to appreciate his merits. The first and most important was that he had to make

himself a name in the art, not against, but in conjunction with the splendid talents of his brother, in the maturity of his powers, whether of nature or study, and constantly to sustain a comparison which was likely to be made by everybody but himself. In his countenance he perhaps more resembled Mrs. Siddons than Mr. Kemble. He had an expression of intelligent innocence, that peculiarly fitted him for the youthful heroes of the drama, and which in advanced life is so characteristic of his look that it has retained him in the performance of parts which otherwise he might be said to have outgrown. He never had the slightest appearance of imitating his brother, and from the first of him always struck me to act from his own perceptions. Deeply retired in himself, confident in his twofold strength of person and industry, there was a calm complacency about Mr. Kemble that kept him always upon his centre in a sort of regardless majesty: he calculated everything, and prophesied his effects. Charles was ardent and anxious to obtain applause; he sometimes became too boisterous in his action and too noisy in his speech; his voice was frequently not under government and pained the ear. If he had thought less of his audience, he would not, to be sure, have pleased them more but served them better.

But let us look at him now that experience has given him more confidence, and circumstances extended his range. We shall find that his predominant excellence is in comedy; and that in a long list of tragic characters there is nothing else near him. He is our Benedick, our Prince Hal (aye, and a Hal who can act Falstaff too), our Petruchio, our Leon, and our Orlando. He is our Charles Surface, our Young Marlow, our Lovemore, our Mirabel, our Don Felix, our Captain Absolute, and our Colonel Feignwell. It is now I believe clear that his Hamlet never ought to have yielded unless to his brother's. His Romeo, his Antony, his Macduff, his Edgar, his Cassio, his Jaffier, his Carlos, his Stukely, and many others, are as near perfection as anything in our own times, and better acted by him than by any other living performer.

The German Theatre now began to excite our attention, and Lessing supplied our adapters with a tragedy called

Emilia Galotti. Mrs. Siddons acted a Countess Orsina. 'Rape and murder are not simple means,' we are informed by our virtuous friend Glenalvon; but they are called into full exercise in this modernisation of the old story of Appius and Virginia. I know not why it had so short an existence among us: the interest was what is called powerful.

Mr. Cumberland wrote them a prologue, in which Mr. Whitfield admired exceedingly the beauty of the theatre, which he contrasted with 'the straw-built' temple (nay, only thatched with straw) 'that held the Drama's God.' Now, however, he proceeds, should the 'eventful time' inspire any second Shakespeare, the future Agincourt will have a nobler field than the Globe Theatre was on the banks of Thames. Our great poet has told us, with his accustomed point, that all appliances and means to boot will not so insure slumber as the distressful labours of humble life. The penury of the early stage obliged the poet to paint for the ear; and the description which set the fancy clearly to work produced a far more splendid series of scenes than even our Loutherbourgs or Stanfields ever executed. But it is certain in the long run, of what is called, and justly, improvement, the principal will be lost among his accessories: you will build upon the machinist and the painter, and you will have palaces worthy of heroes just as the race becomes extinct.

But hear the greatest of all authorities in matters of taste, which I find in letters upon a seemingly different subject written at this very time:—

'The dresses, the scenes, the decorations of every kind, I am told, are in a new style of splendour and magnificence; whether to the advantage of our dramatic taste upon the whole I very much doubt. It is a show and a spectacle, not a play, that is exhibited. This is undoubtedly in the genuine manner of the Augustan age, but in a manner which was censured by one of the best poets and critics of that or any age.'—Burke's *Works*, vol. iv. p. 600, 4to edition.

'Migravit ab aure voluptas
Omnis ad incertos oculos, et gaudia vana:
Quatuor aut plures aulæa premuntur in horas;
Dum fugiunt equitum turmæ, peditumque catervæ.'

Mr. Colman the younger, in a very serious epilogue, drew the attention of the public to the anarchy of political speculation and the murders of philosophy. This Mrs. Siddons must have had great pleasure in speaking, from the eulogy which it contained upon the virtues of our own sovereign. The play needed such a corrective, for its interest proceeded from the tyrannous use of power. We had just experienced, by the treatment of the Royal Family of France, that power may change hands without correcting its excesses. *Emilia Galotti* lived but three nights.

On the 15th of November Whitehead's *Roman Father* was revived, that Mr. Kemble and Mrs. Siddons might perform the Publius and Horatia; but I do not think that this brutal instance of Roman patriotism added much to the fame of either of our accomplished tragedians.

I have stated, at no very great distance from this place, the expectations that were reasonably entertained of the triumph of the new theatre, under the management of Mr. Kemble, and the hopes which it was natural would be formed by himself and his family. But improvidence was working at the heart of the concern to destroy all the advantages adhering actually to that theatre, and annoyances of so serious a kind stood in such a formidable array before Mr. Kemble that he determined to throw up the management; and Mr. Wroughton, in September 1796, was announced to carry on the new system, or no system, of that immense concern.

To Mrs. Siddons I do not imagine the change was of any considerable moment. Talent like hers was sure of engagement, though payment might continue to be attended with difficulties. She might even still more strictly require that performance on the side of the manager, which her brother no doubt often persuaded her to pass over; and resort at last steadily to the good old adage of Swiss reciprocity—*Point d'argent, point de Suisse.* Wroughton, I know, had grown mature in the Covent Garden prejudice against Kemble's management, and was decidedly of opinion that more money would be brought by modern comedy than by ancient tragedy, attended with the vast

expense incident to its revival. There could be no doubt that Mrs. Jordan would think so too; and her influence in the theatre was, from a variety of causes, now become very considerable.

Upon the difficulty sometimes to find in the treasury the cash that had been taken at the door of the theatre volumes might be published. Sometimes, in the absence of everything like money, the mighty master himself would try the witchcraft of his wit upon Lady Macbeth; bring her in triumph along with him to the theatre, and pledge all he had, his honour, that she should be paid if she would but perform. Yes; I hold Sheridan to have been the most irresistible of mortals.

Among the attempts to give something like novelty to Mrs. Siddons, Thomson's *Edward and Eleonora* was tried for a night on the 22nd October, 1796. But the period for such imitations of the Greek stage was long gone by; though the sacrifice of Alcestis really ennobled the wife of Edward. Thomson began life as a true poet, looking at nature with an adoration of her grand features, and a fond affection for even the minutest parts of her endless economy. He was all eye and ear; and out of the library of Shakespeare and Spenser and Milton he had collected a store of bold and nervous language, which expressed much, and hinted more. It conveyed, with an air of much originality, all that he saw, and how he saw it. As he went forward in life he became connected with men who had never seen a mountain, or, to speak without a figure, critics founded upon French models. He, at their suggestion, polished the rough seasons of his native country, wrote interminable travels in blank verse, and tragedies on the plan of Racine. But 'nature will break out,' and our poet in his latest efforts evinced the possession of the most enchanting simplicity. The first canto of *The Castle of Indolence* showed how long he had lingered in the 'delightful land of Faery'; that he had perfectly learned her Spenserian tongue, which he spoke with all the grace and fluency of a native.

While Mrs. Siddons might be said thus to struggle to keep up with her own the fame of English tragedy, the

other Muse was about to suffer a loss which thirty years have scarcely shown a tendency to replace. I mean the elevation of Miss Farren to a coronet, by her marriage with the Earl of Derby in the year 1797. Perhaps I do not refer effects to causes inadequate to their production when I say that this theatrical demise absolutely produced the degeneracy of comedy into farce. The lady of our Congreves lost that court-like refinement in manners, that polished propriety in speech; the coarser parts in comedy were forced forward without a balance, without contrast: cultivated life on the stage became insipid as soon as its representative was without the necessary charms. This, with the natural tendency of revolutionary feelings to degrade everything, produced the absolute fall of genteel comedy, which had long been in a state of decline, and broad laughter reigned triumphant in the unbounded hilarity of Mrs. Jordan.

Many an elegant trifle, I well know, has proceeded from the Muse of Lord Derby; but when that accomplished nobleman, *vatibus addere calcar*, spurred his Pegasus into the compliment which it contained in that remarkable line, 'Perhaps a Farren may return no more,' I could have wished the provinces of poet and prophet had at least for once been disunited.

It well became such a woman as Mrs. Siddons to notice this loss with a kind wish for the future happiness of her amiable sister of the scene. Accordingly, after a most affecting performance by Kemble and herself of Lillo's soul-harrowing *Fatal Curiosity*, to which *The Deuce is in Him* was the farce, she thus noticed that her friend on that day became Lady Derby:—

> 'Our Comic Muse, too, lighter topics lending,
> Proves that in marriage was her natural ending;
> Whilst grateful for those smiles which made us gay,
> Each kindest wish awaits her wedding-day.
> And sure, such talents, honours, shar'd between 'em,
> If 'tis not happy, why—the Deuce is in 'em.'

How all this was instilled into either gods or men, history is silent. The newspapers in the morning might

do something; but some of my understanding friends said it meant a dull compliment to Miss Farren and a pointed attack upon Mrs. Jordan.

> 'Why, what a world is this, when what is comely
> Envenoms her that bears it!'

CHAPTER XX

It was reserved for Kotzebue, through the medium of translation, to add two characters to the list of those performed by Mrs. Siddons. The first of these was Mrs. Haller in *The Stranger; or, Misanthropy and Repentance*, which was acted the 24th of March 1798 at Drury Lane Theatre. I shall not repeat myself in expressing here the opinion formerly given of the character of Mrs. Haller. I do not deny the interest which it excited, for I admit it to have been powerful in the extreme; but I have always thought the sympathy of my fair countrywomen in this case dangerous to their best interests. The Stranger himself is, perhaps, the noblest ruin that has hitherto marked the moral desolation of our own domestic manners.

Looking to dramatic effect, the Misanthropy towers much above the Repentance. Mrs. Haller, seeking friendship and requiring protection, is obliged to external conformity; if she feel the remorse of guilt and would covet the deepest shades of mysterious retirement as an indulgence, she is afraid that singularity would draw attention, and that she can only escape detection by everyday conduct. Suffering much herself, and meriting to suffer, she accepts the consolation of mitigating the sufferings of others; her virtue has been 'sullied, not absorbed,' and she would fain possess the esteem of those around her, though she has lost her own.

Mrs. Siddons acted this character with that subdued power which it required. The taste of Kotzebue did not lead him, like that of Schiller, to poetical elevation of his dialogue. He seems at times to think the stage and society

identical; and his conversation scenes have a flatness and even vulgarity about them which is not to our taste. But there is an interest of the heart making its destined progress through all his plays, and the tears of his audiences are under the most absolute control. This, according to Schlegel, is the decided course of the sentimental dramatist: 'The general lesson which he gives is that sensibility should obtain pardon for all its eccentricities and faults, and that we should drop our rigorous principles when the virtues are under our judgment. Behold how amiable is the youthful avowal of foibles, how sublime the dominion of the passions! What more is necessary than that the author should provide in the close some benevolent patron or forgiving dupe, who, scattering either wealth or pardon with unwithdrawing hand, shall put the seal of oblivion upon the simulated errors of the stage; and, as to society, display the triumphant justification of actual depravity, and the glowing incentive to timid and now not shameless passion?'

We were alarmed at the freedom of our early writers, and the Bowdlers were set to purify their scenes from all loose or equivocal language; but what are *double-entendres* to that seduction which shocks by no external sign, but insinuates itself into the bosom entirely without defence, and in the disguise of that sensibility which is the chief grace of woman?

I freely confess with respect to *The Stranger* that, however I rejoiced in the display of my friend Kemble, I never could, without strong reluctance, submit to see the character of Mrs. Haller represented by his sister. Her countenance, her noble figure, her chaste and dignified manners, were so utterly at variance with the wretched disclosure she had to make, that no knowledge that it was pure, or rather impure fiction could reconcile me to this 'forcible feeble'; that which was true of the character was so evidently false and impossible of its grand and beautiful representative.

Such a play as *The Stranger* would lead one almost to wish that the term comedy retained among ourselves the meaning that it bore in France during the dramatic reigns of Corneille and Racine, when they called *The Cid*, and *Cinna*, and *Andromaque*, and *Bajazet* comedies. Our



division of the genus into its species leaves us without a term to describe this familiar copy of arm-in-arm lounging, superintendence of the household, colloquies with the butler, diving after his little excellency, confessions of adultery, and meetings of the parties in order to separate for ever, which conclude by embracing to part no more. It perhaps classes best with sentimental comedy. It has not the elevation of tragedy, and never borrows its tone of language, or keeps the most affecting scenes from puerility and the mawkish softness of the nursery. It has characters below the level of the serious Muse, but they are not comic.

The domestic manners, which we are so compelled to notice in these German plays, may among that people have a favourable effect and aid the stage illusion. The immortal ridicule of our Minister for these and other Foreign Affairs will best exhibit the vice of such composition.

The second character which Kotzebue supplied was even more dissolute than the first, but a woman of stronger mould. The aspiration of her mind is to be the companion of valour, and her fancy bestows upon mere courage the better feelings of magnanimity and compassion. Detecting that her hero is devoid of humanity, she hates with all the ardour of her former affection, and loses herself the very virtue whose absence in the Peruvian conqueror endangers his life. She is at anybody's service who will but destroy him. The reader sees that I allude to Elvira in the tragedy of *Pizarro*, a play got up by Sheridan himself, and into whose scenes he had infused some of the brilliant figures which he had composed for the impeachment of Warren Hastings.

It is not unlikely that from any other hand (as we used to write) Mrs. Siddons might have scrupled to accept a character so profligate and desperate; but Mr. Sheridan was not a man to be refused, and besides, the threatening popularity of any work to which he lent his name made it policy in a great actress not to condemn herself to her drawing-room for the rest of the season. There can be no doubt that Sheridan saw clearly enough the bad taste of such a camp-follower as Elvira; and he might also think

that Mrs. Siddons would disdain to stifle her proper feelings, and render this Spanish Judith any jot more respectable than her whole class has ever been. However, from the natural desire to stand favourably with the audience, she mounted this lady of adventure into a heroine, and her performance was triumphantly shouted by crowded audiences as long as she continued to act the part.

But, as my friend Stuart told me, he had an opportunity of witnessing Sheridan's dread lest Mrs. Siddons should not 'fall in' with his notion of the character of Elvira. However, without seeking, perhaps in vain, what that notion might exactly be, when he found that she had made her hold upon the house, and that, except the heroic Rolla, nothing stood more prominent than this brave but rather unsafe *chère amie* of Pizarro, he could then persuade himself that she had 'fallen into' his notion of the character, or, in surer language, rendered it not only bearable but successful. Upon the getting up of *Pizarro* Sheridan practised all the artifices of the coy or indolent author—

'That would be wooed, and not unsought be won.'

He made his actors wait for the conclusion of their parts, and gave them, at the last moment, that which I have no sort of doubt he had long meditated and laboriously written. But he knew well the region of a play-house, where either there is no wonder or all is wonder. Actors believe miracles against the evidence of their senses, and credit the elaboration of painful thought in the shape of impromptu. Sheridan would not have trusted his late importations among performers slow of study; the hurry, the anxiety, the alarm, the hope of his agents were favourable to his play; the zeal excited was like the enthusiasm of a crusade; it carried them through everything dangerous in triumph.

Sheridan had no opinion of Mrs. Jordan's tragedy; but there was one charm in her name and another in her voice, and these recommended her to the beloved Cora; though, to use his own words, 'he knew that she could not speak a line of it.' Mr. Sheridan had a very powerful voice, but he declaimed very much in the style of Mr. Kemble, and was attentive to the music of the sentences which he

uttered. He knew all the value of that great actor, and therefore worked up the Rolla of Kotzebue, till it read more like the Charles de Moor of Schiller's *Robbers*, from whom indeed he borrowed that patriotic harangue which applied so admirably to our political circumstances in the year 1799.

Mrs. Siddons, perhaps for the only time in her life, acted on thirty-one successive nights of performance. But when the terrific length of the play was somewhat abridged, and it became smooth from repetition, there might have been even pleasure in the constancy of applause; and, from the full houses, a reasonable prospect of a treasury on the Saturday morning. It is but fair to presume that Mr. Kemble's desertion of the management contributed to this quite unparalleled exertion in Sheridan—preparing *The Stranger* and *Pizarro* for his stage; but he was totally exhausted by so much industry; and from either Wroughton or James Aickin nothing beyond the mere stage management was to be expected.

I have omitted a few pieces of the serious kind, in which Mrs. Siddons acted at Drury Lane Theatre, in order to bring together the two German plays, which alone still live upon our stage, and of which alone Mr. Sheridan was the avowed reformer or adapter, for he translated neither of them. I therefore here notice, in the first place, a play of my own, called *Aurelio and Miranda*, produced on the 29th of December, 1798. It was remarkable for the utter failure of the fourth and fifth acts—the three first being rather powerful in the interest. With the experience of twenty years more, since the subject first struck me, I wonder how I could consent to the feeble arrangement of the plot, which is its vital defect. The passion of love to be treated in the dress of a monastic order is a frightful anomaly. Mrs. Siddons, to appearance, was a young monk, passionately enamoured of the superior, *Aurelio*. The whole piece partook strongly indeed of the nature of the Spanish romantic drama, and was drawn from the impure source of the novel entitled *The Monk*, by Mr. Lewis. This was the only occasion on which I was ever honoured with the professional aid of Mrs. Siddons.

From Mr. Pye, the learned translator of Aristotle, the

rival of Twining, a poet of some experience, it was reasonable to hope for a successful tragedy from English history; but his *Adelaide* was powerful only in scenes; and I despair now of any modern Muse strong enough to assume the stage histories of which Shakespeare has left us so many models, that tempt by the great abundance of their business, and become abortive from the feeble delineations of character, or the little nature in the dialogue.

In Miss Baillie's tragedy of *De Montfort* Mrs. Siddons did her utmost with the Countess Jane. But the basis of the tragedy was the passion of hatred, and the incidents were all gloomy and dark and deadly. On the stage, I believe, no spectator wished it a longer life, and it is to the last degree mortifying to have to exhibit so many proofs that the talent of dramatic writing in its noblest branch was, in fact, dead among us; and the powers of our transcendent actress were, like the mighty arms of some Paladin in romance, entirely unsuited to the feeble children who, to their mere confusion, were tempted to employ them. As some compensation for the failure of modern tragedies Mr. Kemble returned to the management in the season of 1800-1, and ancient tragedy returned with him.

It was now understood among theatrical people that Mr. Kemble's resumption of the management was a step taken towards a purchase into the property, and Mr. Siddons was not disinclined to embark a considerable sum with my late friend in the concern; but I believe he considered the only absolute security to be Mr. Sheridan's retirement altogether, and the great orator held at this time a language highly flattering to such a hope. But this arrangement, however desirable, upon a strict inquiry, was found to be impracticable; and, after a great deal of trouble and much uneasiness, the business ended by the secession of the great tragedians to the other theatre, and the purchase of Mr. Kemble into Covent Garden; the consequences of which unfortunate step are still pressing, and must long press, upon all the parties.

Although principally, no doubt, occupied by the professional exertions of Mrs. Siddons, I cannot pass over in silence that series of domestic sorrows which must have

weighed heavily indeed upon her mind, and contributed, with an almost satiety of public applause, to cloud her progress with melancholy, and make her court a scene of repose and abstraction, however unfriendly to the business of life—indeed to life itself.

Yet Mrs. Siddons was too well read not at all times to remember the consolatory lines of Young, who well understood the nature of man—

> 'His grief is but his dignity disguis'd,
> And discontent is immortality!'

On the 6th of October 1798 her second daughter, Maria, sunk into the grave, at Bristol, of that flattering but usually hopeless malady, a decline. She was in truth one of the loveliest beings that I have ever known. I can hardly bring myself to allow so much, but she was perhaps more beautiful even than her mother, or rather what the latter would have been if, with every indulgence in her earlier years, she had possessed full leisure to cultivate her taste and exercise her fancy, without any of those prodigious exertions which gave at last an appearance of strength and energy not usually characteristic of the English female. The gain is on the side of grandeur; the loss of winning gentleness and almost angelic softness. To confirm this notion a very early picture of Mrs. Siddons resembles this lamented and excellent young lady. There was at one time an expectation that she would have been permitted to give her hand in marriage to the present accomplished President of the Royal Academy. But I hasten from the subject.

When those from whom we derive our being resign their own, full of years and attended by the general regret of society, the pangs of nature may be soothed by reason, corrected by piety, or extenuated by time. Mrs. Siddons had, however, to lament the loss of her father in a very inverted succession, for he died about four years after her daughter, on the 6th of December 1802; but the interval was brief indeed when she was again alarmed by the account of the dangerous state of her eldest daughter, who followed her sister prematurely on the 24th of March,

1803. So rapid was the progress of her malady that she died before her mother's return from Ireland, where the interests of the family had required her exertions. Mrs. Siddons seems to have been long alarmingly depressed at this second string's being severed from the maternal bosom. The sublime and pathetic Young has given in his *Narcissa* what I know to be a just portrait of the person and the loss :—

> 'Song, beauty, youth, love, virtue, joy, this group
> Of bright ideas, flowers of paradise,
> As yet unforfeit ! in one blaze we bind,
> Kneel, and present it to the skies ; as all
> We guess of heav'n : and these were all her own.'

But we are not left to imagine the sorrows of her parent, since—no matter for the motive which gave a private correspondence to the world—we have them expressed in her own language to one whom she long presumed to be her friend. I shall select a few sentences from the letters of Mrs. Siddons about this time, because we are too apt to consider those who delight us upon the stage as persons upon whom private life hardly can be allowed to attach, and who are to be occupied, alas ! solely with the agonies of others. The tyranny of our amusements, the luxury of our taste for simulated sorrows, hardly allows the actual tears for her own to dry upon the cheek of the actress. In the theatre, too, property suffers, engagements must be fulfilled, and the true mourner must hasten to a counterfeit. The actor shares in the common sufferings of his kind without the sacred indulgence of his grief which decency commands in every other condition. But let us hear Mrs. Siddons herself :—

'The testimony of the wisdom of all ages, from the foundation of the world to this day, is childishness and folly if happiness be anything more than a name ; and I am assured our own experience will not enable us to refute the opinion : no, no, it is the inhabitant of a better world. Content, the offspring of moderation, is all we ought to aspire to here, and moderation will be our best and surest guide to that happiness to which she will most assuredly conduct us.' If Mr. —— thinks himself unfortunate, let

him look on me and be silent. The inscrutable ways of Providence! Two lovely creatures gone; and another is just arrived from school with all the dazzling, frightful sort of beauty that irradiated the countenance of Maria, and makes me shudder when I look at her. I feel myself, like poor Niobe, grasping to her bosom the last and youngest of her children; and, like her, look every moment for the vengeful arrow of destruction.'

The passage thus alluded to by Mrs. Siddons is in the 6th Book of the *Metamorphoses* :—

> 'Ultima restabat; quam toto corpore mater
> Totâ veste tegens, unam, minimamque relinque,
> De multis minimam posco, clamavit et unam.'
>
> V. 298.

But the sequel was in mercy averted—

> 'Dumque rogat, pro quâ rogat, occidit.'

My fair readers must not be disappointed as to an English version of the passage, which is neither feebly nor inelegantly rendered by Croxall :—

> 'The last with eager care the mother veil'd,
> Behind her spreading mantle close conceal'd,
> And with her body guarded, as a shield.
> Only for this, this youngest, I implore,
> Grant me this one request, I ask no more :
> O grant me this! she passionately cries :
> But, while she speaks, the destin'd virgin dies.'

The relations of life are seldom changed without some injury to domestic peace. The ascendency of the husband is justified by the duties which are assigned him, and it is his pride to be the support of his family. The merits of Mr. Siddons as an actor had been at length so obscured by the talents of his wife that it did not consist with the interests of the family to allow him to continue on the stage. At one time he purchased into Sadler's Wells, and the concern was for some seasons successful; but the profits at length declined, and I believe when he quitted it on the whole it had been rather injurious to his fortune. This fate attended another speculation from which he had promised himself great advantages, and the greatest of all in the having an object to pursue with the hope of benefiting his

matter to her, had allowed it to drop was best known to himself: he had to give his theatre for a night, and Mrs. Siddons had consented to act, that is, to fill it, if he did. She saw the point quite in its true light, and though she had many objections to the conduct of the manager, addressed a letter to him, tending to put her character and conduct right with the public. She was never fond of such personal explanations in print, but the occasion seemed to demand a vindication of her outraged humanity, and her letter to Mr. Jones does honour to her understanding and her heart:—

'DUBLIN, *December* 8, 1802.

'SIR,—I take the liberty of addressing you on a subject which has caused me much uneasiness. Public censure is, under any circumstances, well calculated to wound our feelings, but it is peculiarly distressing when it is heightened by injustice. That reports most injurious to me have been circulated can no longer be doubted when I assure you that I understand it is generally believed that I refused to play for the Lying-in Hospital. On this subject you will, I am sure, be as anxious to do me justice as I am solicitous to vindicate myself in the eyes of the public. I therefore beg leave to bring to your recollection that you did me the honour of calling on me at my house in Park Street last summer, when it was liberally proposed on your part, as it was most cheerfully accepted on mine, that I should perform for some charity. You also recollect that it was considered by us both as a compliment justly due to Lady Hardwicke that she should have the choice of the particular charity for which I was to perform; and you thought it likely that her Excellency would give her preference to the Lying-in Hospital. You also, sir, must remember that I was not only willing but desirous of exerting myself for the benefit of so laudable an institution.

'Why so amiable a purpose was not immediately promoted I cannot even guess; but sure I am that its postponement cannot be attributed to any backwardness on my part. The same motives which actuated me then are no less powerful now; and it will give me infinite pleasure, if,

by the exertion of any powers I possess, I can be able to promote an important object of public utility.

'And now, sir, if I may be permitted to speak of myself as a private individual, I have only to regret the sad necessity imposed upon me of vindicating my character from the imputation of a failing as unamiable as, I trust, it is foreign to my nature. I regret that I should be constrained, from unfortunate circumstances, to endeavour to rescue myself from an obloquy which I hope I have never incurred by my conduct. I regret that the country in which I am obliged to do so should be Ireland.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) 'S. SIDDONS.

'To Frederic Edward Jones, Esq.'

Although Mrs. Siddons had thus devoted herself to promote her brother's interest, and transferred her attraction, which continued scarcely abated, from Drury Lane Theatre to Covent Garden, it was without any junction as to the property. The sixth purchased by Mr. Kemble was exclusively his own; and he paid down £10,000, in part of the £23,000, its estimated value, leaving his accumulating profits in Mr. Harris's hands to liquidate the remainder. But, though she chose to be there merely as an actress upon a salary, the alteration as to the house was productive of many comforts. Inviolable respect she was sure of everywhere, and her brother was the stage manager also at Drury Lane Theatre during the greater period of her connection with that house. I never could perceive that she was more attended to by him than any other lady would have been holding the same rank. He sometimes entreated the treasurer would let her have some part of her long arrears; but such offices he was disposed to render other persons equally, performers and authors. The superior comfort now was that all that uncertainty was at an end which disgraced the régime of Mr. Sheridan's house. The manager of Covent Garden Theatre was really a man of business, who did not consider himself entitled to delay, much less alienate, the stipulated payment for which he had received the valuable labours of his performers. I

never knew a gentleman better calculated to be at the head of a theatrical concern than the late Thomas Harris, Esquire; and, fortunately for him, his power was not a matter that could be disputed, owing to a clause in the covenants of purchase; during his life the management vested solely in him—the stage manager acted under his authority. Mr. Harris's system of management was built on the two principles of variety and novelty, and he looked strongly to the commercial or profitable side of things. Perhaps he was not enough aware of his partner's real value; but of Mrs. Siddons he knew the exact importance —her wonderful talents, and the splendid train of admirers which would now be the ornaments of his theatre, and perhaps put a seal upon the doors of the rival establishment.

The very face of his house was expressive of his expectations. The enviable retreats of sixteen private boxes tenanted by the Northumberlands, the Devonshires, the Abercorns, the Hollands, the Egremonts, and so on, taken at a rent of £300 per annum, was a flattering earnest of what his new connection would achieve for him. Added to this, the grace of high rank and fashion, he was now about to place his theatre first in the scale of reason, from the superior power he possessed of presenting the standard works of our great poets. The Apollo had not yet sunk into the flaming ruins of Drury, but stood as if meditating his flight from a temple erected to his honour, but quite unfinished either within the walls or without.

It might have been expected that Covent Garden, proud of its great accessions in the whole of the Kemble family of tragic moment, would have opened with one of Shakespeare's tragedies strongly cast, *Macbeth*, for instance, and struck the town with its full strength at first. But there were various reasons against it which respected the feelings of the rest of the company; and on the first night the new management was contented to let the house, in all its beauty and improvement, speak for itself, and Mr. Fawcett bespeak the public favour to their new commander of the stage by a liberal and well-merited compliment to the services of his predecessor. Mr. Kemble, accordingly, made his first appearance alone in *Hamlet*, and Mrs.

Siddons, like her brother, repeated her original *début* in town, and acted Southerne's Isabella on the 27th of September, 1803.

There is sometimes a wild notion that the audiences of one theatre are differently affected from those of another; and some persons seemed alarmed at the result to Mrs. Siddons of invading a region of rather lighter amusement than the stage of Garrick. But her own identity was not surer than the feeling she excited; and unresisted passion stormed every breast within her new sphere of exertion. If I am not mistaken her pathos was even more profound than less; to which, indeed, her personal afflictions must have contributed. On the 6th of October she acted Lady Randolph; and her son, Mr. Siddons, was the Douglas—Mr. Kemble took the part of old Norval. This was followed by Elvira in *Pizarro*; but to his other vices that adventurer now added drunkenness, and his representative, Cooke, being unable to speak the part, her son read it, and read it so well as to gain much credit by doing the friendly office.

The present was the age of revolutions. The most surprising events had occurred on the stage of real life, and the mimic world followed the course which seemed to strike down all reasonable expectations. It might have been supposed that Mrs. Siddons and her brother had now established their tragic supremacy so as to 'laugh a siege to scorn'—their proud citadel was taken by storm, and the assailant was an ignorant boy.

> 'Quoniam medio de fonte lepôrum
> Surgit amari aliquid, quod in ipsis floribus angat.'
> *Lucret.* Bk. 4. v. 1127.

But the triumph of Covent Garden had not been complete even in their first season. One might have imagined that Drury Lane Theatre would suffer dreadfully by such a diminution of its strength. By no means. Bannister took the management, and his receipts averaged £242, 2s. 8d. nightly through the season. The causes of this singular result were three: *The Caravan—Cinderella*—and *The Soldier's Daughter*. The first of these had no greater principle than the making a Newfoundland dog jump into

real water, contained in a tank upon the stage, to recover Julio, the son of the Marchioness of Calatrava, plunged from a precipice into the river below on account of her resistance to the passion of the Governor of Barcelona. It was, what an afterpiece may very properly be, an ingenious trick, surprising by its novelty. It was repeated forty times during its first season. The second of these charmers was one which secured us all originally in the nursery; and now, mingling mythology with Mother Goose, attracted the largest second price to the theatre that had been known. It was repeated fifty-four times during the season; or, to speak more correctly as well as favourably, between the 3rd of January and the 11th of June. The third, a comedy written by Mr. Cherry, and beautifully acted by Mrs. Jordan, during its run on the first season, kept up by either *The Caravan* or *Cinderella*, brought in twenty nights' performance the sum of £7544, 14s. 6d. Thus, to use a favourite expression of Mr. Kemble's, 'as it happens for ever in theatres, a lucky chance had turned up for them,' and the Drury Lane people were not ruined, even with Kemble and his brother Charles, Mrs. Siddons and her most accomplished daughter-in-law, Braham, Incledon, and Storace, all at Covent Garden Theatre.

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[1] Salathiel Pavy had acted old men for three years with very uncommon skill, and died before he had completed his thirteenth year. Mr. Gifford, in a note upon the epitaph which Ben Jonson composed to his honour, observes, as he might be expected to do, the care taken of the education of these children of St. Paul's and the Royal Chapels—'they were opposed,' he says, 'only to one another. Nothing so monstrous ever entered into the thoughts of the managers of those days as taking infants from the cock-horse and setting them to act with men and women.' They had a minor theatre for one

'Parvola, Pumilio, χαρίτων τα, tota merum sal.'

his philosophy, anxiously inquire. Mrs. Siddons had been (worthily I admit) long worshipped among the higher orders. What scenes of pale and fluttering hypocrisy must have been acted when those who catch at every sort of distinction were obliged to exhibit themselves proud of following the boy Roscius, and hardly able to avoid decently, before the great woman, the hyperbolical nonsense which all ranks indeed slavered out, from morn to night, in his commendation! I do not feel quite sure whether it be not wiser to avoid the imputation of envy which sincere conduct is sure to excite; and, instead of attempting to throw impediment in the dance of folly around its idol, to assume that smile and good-humoured laugh which, in the late Sir Joshua Reynolds, passed with the critical for derision, and with the simpleton for congenial admiration.

I have it from unquestionable authority, that Mrs. Siddons disdained at any time to compliment the young hero; and being convinced herself that the effect was delusive, maintained a cold reserve upon the subject, and heard the absurdities in society with much equanimity. That it might strengthen her wish for retirement is likely enough; but, however we may learn to undervalue the public applause, it is difficult for one on whom it has been long bestowed to bear the dreary vacuity of private life. La Vallière, driven from the embraces of Louis XIV. by the superior charms of De Montespan, did wisely when she withdrew to the shelter of the cloister, which concealed at least the chagrin it might be unable to banish.

Mrs. Siddons was not called upon either to 'pursue the triumph or partake the gale.' Mrs. Litchfield was selected by Mr. Kemble to act with Master Betty. Her figure did not rise to the grand and commanding; but she had a very clear and perfect tone of voice, and that accurate knowledge of the business of the stage which the occasion required. The list of Betty's characters during his first run was proper enough. The oldest character was Hamlet, who in the outset of the play is so young as to talk of going back to school again at Wittemberg, and yet at the grave of Ophelia is proved to have attained his thirtieth year. The business of the play does not occupy a year. Perhaps

Shakespeare suited the age of his character to that of its representative: a further indication may perhaps be found in an expression of the Queen Mother during the fencing scene—'He's fat and scant of breath'; circumstances which apply rather to the full habit of manhood than to that youthful figure described as 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form.'

From this and a thousand other instances of the great poet's carelessness and want of revising his play as a whole, the assertion of his player-editors seems, I confess, to me entitled to the fullest credit: 'that what he wrote came from his pen with so much easiness, that they scarce received from him a blot in any of his papers.' He very probably sent his works to the theatre for study, act by act, as he composed them, and trusted to memory for keeping them consistent throughout. That different printed copies of the same play are more or less full and perfect proves nothing against this position: the printer exhibited, unauthorised, all that he could acquire at the time; when he augmented the copy he did so, not because the author had composed additional passages, but in consequence of his having found access to the true and perfect original, by which the deficiencies of his former publication were supplied. I disbelieve all first sketches by Shakespeare.

CHAPTER XXI

THE retirement of Mrs. Siddons at this period had a cause more distressing than the public delirium; she had a long and dangerous illness that confined her to her chamber, and hardly allowed her power to change her position; when recovered she returned to Ireland, and performed with her wonted energy and popularity. The second season of the Young Roscius lowered his pretensions; but, having made his fortune, he was now sent to college, and I presume the cultivation of his understanding did no great injury to his subsequent performances on the stage. The winter of 1806-7 once more beheld Mrs. Siddons and her brother acting with undisputed supremacy, and I do not recollect at any period to have more enjoyed their transcendent efforts. The great actress had become fuller in her person and more majestic than ever. Her Volumnia, her Katharine, her Lady Macbeth, were at their *nil ultra*. She was no longer in danger of new studies, from which nothing was to be hoped; but when she chose to act was followed, as the most accomplished of all actresses merited to be, as the genuine interpreter of the inspired oracles of Poesy.

But a dreadful calamity was at hand, and the 20th of September 1808 was marked by the conflagration of the theatre which she so much adorned.

The modern stage affects reality infinitely beyond the proper objects of dramatic representation. Muskets are fired, with their wadding, to lodge, for aught anybody can tell, in some crevice; and at last, in the night time, the lurking pest bursts forth to the ruin of a stately building,

and half its neighbourhood. The drum that used to threaten with its empty ordnance the canvas walls of some fortified city must soon give way to the real implements of war; and the guardsmen who nightly act the heroic troops of all times and nations may march from their quarters to the playhouses, preceded by their own bands, and drawing their field-pieces to a boarded field of battle. The delightful odour of powder, mingling with that of gas, renders a theatre the most unsavoury place we can enter. Formerly the painted scene was a scene of battle, whereon immovable combatants suggested to the fancy of the spectator, and the prompter's troops behind contributed the vocal cheer to the shock of armies. We now fill the stage with something like a detachment; and, in the midst of confusion and noise, two unknown champions occupy the front of the stage by a display of the broad-sword exercise, and the sparks of their courage alarm the drowsy musician in the orchestra lest the blade itself should descend and 'mar the pleasure of the time' it was trying to beat to his music.

It is in vain to dispute the inference from all this absurdity. The million will always be governed by the eye. In proportion as by over-attention to them the accessories become principals, the writer and the actor vanish together. Their art cannot exist without the full triumph of that art. The 'thoughts that breathe, the words that burn,' of the poet inform the features, inspire the tongue of the accomplished actor—together they have power beyond their originals, and the stage of Shakespeare and Siddons is more true to nature than history itself.

But the tide set now so strongly in favour of these improvements of dramatic exhibition, that after a decent interval of sorrow for their actual loss, and before the ashes of the late pile were well cold, the proprietors determined to erect an edifice of transcending magnificence, and turn their disaster into triumph. The first stone of the new theatre was laid by his present Majesty, then Prince of Wales, on Saturday, the 31st of December 1808. Among the ladies who attended upon this occasion, Mrs. Siddons was placed where she could best see the important

ceremony. She wore a plume of black feathers, forgetting the ominous foreboding of her own Isabella. The rain descended in torrents, and Kemble would not abate one jot of punctilio on such an occasion, but, like King Lear, bareheaded, and in white silk stockings,

'Endur'd the pelting of the pitiless storm.'

Mrs. Siddons, who knew he had just left his room, after a month's confinement, was perfectly in agony at this exposure of his person. His venerable partner, Mr. Harris, on that day, laid in the foundation of a paralytic disorder which conducted him to his grave. My superstition remembered the war of elements that had commemorated the preliminaries of peace with France a few years back, and would not countenance the joy that looked so extremely like sorrow. I shrunk away from the dreary scene with a damp upon my spirits that I did not care to spread among my friends. As to my dear Kemble, through this whole business he trod in air. The amazing structure—the vast patronage—the private boxes—the now unquestionable increase of prices, filled his mind with not unreasonable hopes of affluence and triumph. Perhaps Mrs. Siddons herself expected to be teased by the ashionable world to use her influence with her brother that their application for the luxuries of the new theatre might obtain a friendly preference.

There was at this time but little expectation that our great actress would herself act in the new theatre. She really wished to retire. But I must not anticipate. Scarcely did the solidity of Mr. Smirke's edifice begin to show itself in progress, when the metropolis was called, by the conflagration of the other house, to express no common wonder and even alarm at the fate which joined them in equal ruin. So speedy a coincidence, as it defied the doctrine of chances and the probabilities of life, so in the breasts of persons suffering by the system of irregularity at that house it begot a suspicion that the destruction of Drury Lane Theatre was wilful. One person was frequently named as the contriver of the whole mischief, and he, certainly, was a man who possessed the entire means in

himself; but his very accusers could assign no motive to such an action.

It was on the 24th of February, 1809, that this beautiful, light, and yet vast work of Mr. Holland, unfinished externally to the last, was consumed by fire. It was a more regular and splendid conflagration than that of Covent Garden Theatre, and exhibited by twelve o'clock at night the sublime because terrible view of one unbroken body of flame for the space of at least four hundred and fifty feet. Some of the performers, among whom was my friend Charles Mathews, at a personal risk sufficiently alarming, threaded the suffocating maze of passages and bore away their personal property. Mrs. Jordan found some kind help in this disaster, and lost, I think, little or nothing. Sheridan had used his theatre as a store to deposit the spoils of office; and by this fire was destroyed the whole of the furniture which adorned his house in Somerset Buildings, when he was for a short time Treasurer of the Navy. He was himself in the House of Commons when he received the disastrous intelligence, and he behaved with his accustomed fortitude. The sympathy of the House would have led the members to adjourn, but he refused such a personal compliment to his feelings; and only at the proper time could be prevailed upon himself to repair to the neighbourhood of his ruin, where he sat out the last appearance of conflagration. When the reader reflects upon the state of this great man's finances, the little hope he could entertain of his theatre's being rebuilt at all, or of its ever yielding an income to him again if it were, and is told that neither his fortitude nor his pleasantry abandoned him, he may suspect that wit has a buckler more impassive than adamant, and think him an object of envy in every condition of his fortune.

There is a relation of circumstances to each other, which is often only succession, sometimes cause and effect. Whether Drury Lane would have been safe had the Kemble and the Siddons remained there, we can form no probable solution: a glue-pot may boil over in one management as well as another. But, as they were the positive causes of *Pizarro's* being acted at Covent Garden Theatre, the wad-

ding of the Spanish soldier indubitably could not have lodged in the flies, had there not been this call for firing his musket; and thus a whimsical friend of mine proved that the Kembles were the cause of this conflagration: but his argument has a longer train than he suspected, and as properly includes Mr. Sheridan, the writer, Mr. Kotzebue, the inventor, and even Pizarro himself, the conqueror of Peru. However sound the philosophy, on the present occasion it would be irreverent to proceed farther in this chain of causes; but Wollaston has made a noble use of this great position in the fifth section of his work, to which I would, for the highest of purposes, refer every reader.[1]

During the latter part of the season 1808-9, while the Covent Garden company was acting in the Haymarket, Mrs. Siddons announced some of her characters in the bills for the last time; but she yielded to the interests of the new theatre, and accepted an engagement at fifty pounds a week, terms both complimentary and just. There was no wantonness here of seeing how far liberality would stretch; the precarious tenure by which such excellence was held, after the steady exertions of thirty-six years, might have justified something even beyond this remuneration.

In accompanying Mrs. Siddons through her splendid career I have not often turned aside to consider other professors of her art, nor revived my own uneasiness at the progressive losses of the stage. But, during the temporary sojourn of the Covent Garden company in the Haymarket, a retirement took place which, in the words of our memorable sage, once more really 'eclipsed the gaiety of nations, and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure.' I allude to the farewell acknowledgments of a gentleman whom I had the happiness to know, and long to esteem, the late unrivalled William Lewis, Esq. With a handsome fortune, the produce and the reward of unexampled diligence, steadiness, and principle, he determined to quit the scene while he was in full possession of its comic charm, and having for the last time indulged his spectators and himself in unbounded hilarity, finished by the excitement of their tears and his own.

[1] See *Relig. of Nature*, page 114 of the edition 1759, 8vo.

It was on the 29th of May, 1809, that this great comedian appeared in Michael Perez, the Copper Captain of Beaumont and Fletcher, for the last time. The comedies of his own time were, perhaps, indebted to him for their success; but they are not so highly rated as to allow of an appeal to them as criteria of his talent. *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* is likely to be a favourite in all ages, and until it becomes an opera, which, in other words, is until the characters make no pretence of being acted at all, there never can be a more diverting exhibition of this original than Lewis afforded. It is delightful to me to recall his eager gullibility, his rueful change. The rich description of the mean lodging, where in truth Fletcher is all but Shakespeare, came from him in all the perfection of the art—like the Don John of Henderson, where even the words themselves derived an extended power from the way in which they were spoken. I must instance in one passage where the actor really equalled the author :—

> 'There's an old woman, that's now grown to marble,
> Dried in this brick-kiln, and she sits i' the chimney,
> Which is but three tiles rais'd, like a house of cards,
> The true proportion of an old smok'd Sybil :
> There is a daughter, too, that nature meant
> For a maid-servant, but 'tis now a monster;
> She has a husk about her like a chestnut,
> With laziness and living under the line here :
> And these two make a hollow sound together,
> Like frogs, or winds between two doors that murmur.'

But where he absolutely exceeded all expectation, even from spirits like his own, was in the first scene of the fifth act, where he meets with Cacafogo, who has been cozened too, and by a woman also (indeed the same woman); the convulsive joy of his laugh, frequently renewed, and invariably compelling the whole audience to a really painful sympathy, was one of the most brilliant exploits of the comedian. If we ever die of excessive laughter, I should imagine such must be the expression of that uncontrollable emotion, where the fancy lords it over the whole animal economy, and the strings of life itself crack under the dangerous enjoyment.

However, his reign of gaiety was at length to close, and

Mr. Lewis advanced to utter the only unwelcome expressions that his friends and admirers ever heard from him. It is usually ridiculous when the performer employs some versifier, uninterested beyond the sound of his own lines, to string the common-place acknowledgments and figures together which he is to deliver to his patrons; and there can be but little variety thrown into similar thanks for similar benefits in either verse or prose. But there is a charm in even premeditation when it looks spontaneous, and the language of real life should sometimes be heard from the stage. On the present occasion Mr. Lewis spoke as follows:—

'LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.—I have the honour of addressing you for the last time. This is the close of my theatrical life, and I really feel so overcome by taking leave for ever of my friends and patrons, that, might it not be deemed disrespectful or negligent, I could wish to decline it; but it is a public duty which I owe, and I will attempt to pay it, conscious that I shall meet your indulgence: for when I remind you that I have been thirty-six years in your service, and cannot recollect to have once fallen under your displeasure, my dramatic death cannot be met by me without the strongest emotions of regret and gratitude.

'I should offer my acknowledgments for innumerable acts of kindness shown to my earliest days, and your yet kinder acceptance of, and partiality shown to, my latest efforts: all these I powerfully feel, though I have not the words to express those feelings. But while this heart has a sensation it will beat with gratitude. Ladies and Gentlemen, with the greatest respect, and (if you will admit the word) the sincerest affection, I bid you farewell.'

> 'Some natural tears he dropt, but wip'd them soon;
> The world was all before him, where to choose
> His place of rest, and Providence his guide.'

Mr. Lewis had rather a spare habit of body, but seemed always in possession of even florid health, to which his daily walk for a couple of hours greatly contributed. His figure, from his deportment, might be deemed even elegant in the

scenes of comic luxuriance; when he exceeded all the common bounds set to human action he never was vulgar, no, not for an instant. Where all the manners are diverting it is difficult to sketch any in very bold relief; but he had one peculiarity, which was the richest in effect that could be imagined, and was always an addition to the character springing from himself. It might be called an attempt to take advantage of the lingering sparks of gallantry in the aunt, or the mother of sixty, or the ancient maiden whom he had to win, to carry the purposes of those for whom he was interested. He seemed to throw the lady by degrees off her guard, until at length his whole artillery of assault was applied to storm the struggling resistance; and the Mattockses and the Davenports of his attentions sometimes complained of the perpetual motion of his chair, which compelled them to a ludicrous retreat, and kept the spectator in a roar of laughter. In short, whether sitting or standing, he was never for a moment at rest—his figure continued to exhibit a series of undulating lines, which indicated a self-complacency that never tired, and the sparkling humour of his countenance was a signal hung out for enjoyment that it would have been treason against human happiness to refuse to obey.

To write for Lewis could hardly be said to be difficult. Fill his heart with generosity and his head with frolic—let him enter every man's house and inquire the concerns of every living soul of both sexes—turn him loose to do all that he fancies; let him plunge into ridiculous disaster, and be relieved only by improbability—make him, in a word, the harlequin of modern comedy, and only take care that the less mercurial personages of the play do not spoil any of his leaps, and the business is achieved.

But all this was personal to the actor, and so absolutely was this the case that, because Lewis himself was to be exhibited, the comedies were never much varied; and, like an adventurer on the greater stage, the hero only passed under different names, but invariably played all his old tricks. I have never seen the characters of Mr. Lewis in modern comedy played by other actors, and, therefore, am unable to state by what still more grotesque achievements they

laboured to compensate the certain want of features, and whim, and absolute *gaieté du cœur* which so distinguished the lively original. Happily for the provinces, they have their own humorists, to whose style they have been long accustomed, and in sending them the better actor we might not always benefit the new piece.

Among the conversational excellences of Lewis was the power of telling a story well. He embellished the groundwork usually, I confess; but the additions were so rich and brilliant that it was impossible to desire the narrative other than he left it. There was a something high and gentlemanly in his course of life; he never degraded himself in dancing after patronage, but looked to his art and his industry as the sole means of attaining an honourable affluence, and he attained it. He fortunately burst away from the ensnaring property of the great London theatres, and consequently passed his latter days in comfort, and left his family wealthy.

The repose of Mrs. Siddons seemed now at some distance. She had agreed to open the new house on the 18th of September, 1809, in Lady Macbeth, and in dumb show passed through the character, hooted and reviled by an organised body of rioters, demanding to be admitted upon the old prices, and thence called O. P's. This was a second attempt on the part of the proprietors of theatres to raise the rates of admission; and their opinions upon this subject, like those of other men, seem to have fluctuated with their interest. In the time of that miserable statesman Lord North, those gentlemen were applied to on the subject of a tax upon the theatres, to be covered by a slight addition to the money paid at their doors. Their answer was most decidedly this: 'that any alteration in such a matter must inevitably produce the absolute ruin of their properties'; and so America escaped the armed invasion of pantomime. When we think of such resources as these among objects of taxation, we are apt to fancy there must be some mistake in the history of later times, or that the term of a heaven-born minister was applied without much licence to William Pitt.

It is not my design to go into the history of the O. P.

war. My heroine was only not stricken down by the careless hostility of the rabble, who were inspired with a very remarkable hatred to the house of Kemble. Let me indulge myself with the recollection of her brilliant figure on this first night. She wore a dress fashioned after the bridal suit of the unfortunate Queen of Scots, and was a perfect blaze of jewels in the stomacher of the dress, as well as upon the hair and around her neck. Whether some exaggeration might not increase the cost of this dress I know not; but the theatre itself used to talk of some hundred pounds laid out, not only on that, but the regal dress of Macbeth himself.

One may now venture to speak on this subject with the freedom of history, and look into the secret causes of so remarkable a failure. The real fact is that too much was attempted at one time. The prospect before the proprietors was an entire monopoly of the public. Covent Garden Theatre was to possess every enviable convenience and display every kind of talent. The fashionable world has only one species of amusement at which they are not subject to the intrusion of strangers—the Italian opera. It is a very dear privilege, and the space they occupy is little more than the carriage itself contains which conveys them to it. By devoting one entire tier to the nobility and gentry the proprietors of Covent Garden Theatre could offer to their patrons a box, accessible at any time, with an ante-room, when they chose to withdraw for conversation or refreshments; there was besides a general saloon for the occasional promenade of the privileged orders, and every arrangement made to render a public place of entertainment to them as select and private as their own residences —they quitted their boxes by exclusive staircases, and left the theatre from doors equally devoted to themselves.

Such was the attempt now made to secure to the drama of our country those who, it was imagined, from the privilege rather than the performance, had hitherto patronised the opera; but if a fondness for Italian music, executed in the highest perfection, was still an object of solicitude, our great proprietors, or undertakers, were prepared to gratify that passion also; they had engaged Catalani herself, and

were disposed to add the fascinating graces of the ballet to all the known captivations of either sense or sound. Had they at first opened at the old prices I am sure the other objects would have been carried. The fashion of life is essential to a theatre—if we do not envy we admire, and it is not by his nature that man is revolutionary—he seldom owns entirely to himself the allegiance he yet admits to great rank, great beauty, splendid dress, and services in the style of almost respectful veneration. If it be said that these high pretensions of the new theatre could only be triumphant by the greatest exertions on their part; that the splendid talent of Mrs. Siddons could not long be with them, and that a perpetual supply of novel excellence must maintain the ascendency they had gained; they might fancy, indeed might say, that they had no rivals in the market—that the Opera House was embarrassed with debt, and Drury in ruins, never probably to rise again—that from their credit as merchants they could almost always obtain any sterling attraction or object of caprice, and that, now they had secured the leading nobility of the land, it was quite certain that the gentry and inferior orders would choose to be where the best company was assembled.

I remember from the first, however, of the conflict, Catalani was the grand theme of discontent; and we heard of native talent from the rioters, though they would not allow us to hear it from the stage. Poor Mrs. Dickons was ridiculously singled out for an object preferred to the great charmer. A finished singer she unquestionably was, and probably read music with facility that the lovely Italian would have needed to study; but we sometimes respect what we cannot love: the singer may be as true as the notes themselves before her, and more full of graces, though to delight may be for ever unattainable.

For a few nights the principal object seemed to be to riot, no matter about what. As the business proceeded it acquired heads to reduce the whole to system, and the lovely elements of Jacobinism covered the fronts of the boxes with placards by the foot, and added a band of suitable instruments to the discordant braying of their champions. Law was bound hand and foot in its own forms, and could

only refer the proprietors to 'the coming on of time.' The lesson of Macbeth had not been lost upon them. Among the most deadly weapons in the armoury of the assailants hypocrisy was soon discovered. 'The theatre was a licensed brothel, and the private boxes the impure styes of abandoned and titled sensuality.' This happy thought absolutely ruined the whole concern. Gibbon has admirably expressed what followed such a hint: 'The coldest nature is animated, the firmest reason is moved by the rapid communication of the prevailing impulse; and each hearer is affected by his own passions and by those of the surrounding multitude.' The ravers about indecorum, who libelled the female nobility by thus suggesting impracticable depravity, were sitting with declared profligacy by their own sides; or walking in the lobbies with the licensed traders in prostitution, insulting everything decent in their own rank. After sixty-seven nights of outrage, thin houses, and exhausted spirits, the contest thus closed: the price to the boxes became seven shillings, that to the pit remained at three shillings and sixpence; the private circle was opened to the public to the full extent of the semi-circle, and the property boxes became so limited in number as to defeat entirely the object of their erection.

There was that respectful attention to Mrs. Siddons during this whole business, that through two volumes of trash collected upon the subject her name is not mentioned; they did not desire her to act where she could not be heard; and, being out of their sight, the rioters had nothing to remind them of her existence. The entrance of Charles Kemble was a favourite signal to renew the assault. I have said that hypocrisy mingled in this business, and fanaticism, as usual, was not far off. A layman of the Church of Christ, alarmed at the destruction which theatres, it seems, brought upon pagan antiquity, on the 16th October 1809 occupied the present *Times* with the most dreadful forebodings; and deprecates, that is, insinuates, the bringing the grey hairs of our sovereign with sorrow to the grave by our persevering to foster those establishments which even an Archbishop of our liberal Church has called 'the Devil's chapels.' I quote but one sentence of his

'drowsy hum,' and hint with tenderness my apprehension that the imagination is not absolutely clean that expresses a devout alarm in the following terms: 'Shall Christians revel in licentiousness and debauchery? Shall these associate with, or encourage by their presence, the most dissolute of both sexes? Let those who have cast off all fear of God, whose glory is their shame, who, being past feeling, have given themselves up to lasciviousness, and to work all uncleanness with greediness—let those frequent the theatre; they act consistently: but let no one who enters that sink of impurity assume the name of a Christian, nor dare to lift up the same heart that has been entertained with all manner of lewdness to that Being of infinite purity!'

It is not my intention to enter into the dispute between the Christian and the comedian. My charity, beyond that of Catholicism or Methodism, can think the characters perfectly compatible, and feel the value of works of taste, and know their often unsuspected effect upon morals. But in utter scorn of modern calumny I deliberately affirm that the purity and utility of all spectacles must depend upon the presence of the higher orders. I would not sully my page with even the titles of productions at some minor theatres, which are calculated for the passions, and suited to the taste alone of the lower classes. There is a gross ignorance or indifference in certain situations as to our public amusements; instead of protecting such as alone have a tendency to refine the manners, they allow them to be invaded and impoverished, and overborne by every variety of obtrusive bad taste, bad language, and still worse principle. But I am drawn into the indulgence of the feeling excited while I am writing, and return, therefore, to the peace established between the high contracting theatrical parties on the night of the 15th of December 1809. Many points were carried of great importance. 'Magistracy may be defied,'—'Conspiracy may be permitted,'—'Fidelity may be punished,'—and 'the gentry of the land be both insulted and taxed by the same description of orators as represent the electors of Westminster in front of the hustings at Covent Garden.' The unfortunate proprietors drank the 'eisel' poured out to them, and

swallowed as evidently a portion of the crocodile; and after begging pardon most humbly for endeavouring to preserve their property, and discharging one of the most deserving persons in their theatre, they were suffered to resume the business of the season, and solicit the public to revisit what had been so recently the most disgusting of all houses.

Mrs. Siddons had opened the theatre on the 18th of September 1809, and her second night of performance was the 24th of April 1810, when she repeated her Lady Macbeth. Such an interval spoke loudly for the taste of a London audience. Now, however, points of moment having been adjusted, the great actress was allowed to speak in the magical *chef-d'œuvre* of Shakespeare without interruption, and the public came again into the regular enjoyment of the purest of its pleasures. She repeated this character on the 30th, and on the 2nd of May performed Lady Randolph, in *Douglas*, for the benefit of the Theatrical Fund.

I notice on the 23rd of May one of the most attractive performances of the season. Fawcett selected for his benefit the play of *King Lear*—he himself took the part of Kent, a character which all who know him will be aware was exactly suited to him. As, however, he was new in it, Mr. Kemble rehearsed Lear with him; and when it was done, drew from the 'man of his word' an exclamation of astonishment at the amazing power he had displayed. He frankly told the great actor that he had often seen him at night, but never had thought him near his present excellence; never had himself been so moved as he then was. Mr. Kemble said that, however singular it might be, in Lear an audience quite unsettled him; the noise of the box-doors caught his ear, and routed all his meditated effects; and he found it absolutely impossible to do that at night which he had thrown out during the rehearsal in the morning.

The astonishing impression made by Garrick in Lear is well known, and the discipline into which he brought his stage business—I had almost said his audience. In his small theatre every individual could be well seen, and any noisy intemperance was removed in a moment. Conver-

sation above a whisper was checked immediately, as indecent, while so great a man was upon the stage; and the necessity of profound silence during certain scenes introduced the custom of stationing what were called hush men in different parts of the house, who, by 'histing along,' as Milton has it, the 'mute silence' in the proper places, begot an awful attention in the audience, and left the full impression of his vast powers upon the suspended and chilled spectators.

I believe nobody ever took less pains than Mrs. Siddons to second her efforts on the stage by those ingenuous arts which, if they assist the performer, no less benefit the hearer. Audiences like ours are mixed up of such discordant materials: a positive or a vague desire of amusement in some; vanity in others, with the true feeling of art, or without it; honest homely sense; refinement, and its excess, affectation; with an aimless hilarity, a restless joy, and much of a coarse and sluggard notice, moved more by its neighbours than the stage—all this to be blended and bound together by the eye and ear attributes a something like magic to the actor's art.

The last season but one of our great actress, 1810-11, she performed nearly the whole of her characters, and never did she display greater dignity and force of mind. The singular lot of this consummate artist was to possess some compensation through life for every excellence that time could not but diminish. It would be absurd to say that her Autumn excited the tears of her April when her Isabella, her Shore, and her Belvidera were in their prime, and in my time were neither equalled nor approached; but I may reasonably inquire whether I myself have not lost more than the actress ever did, and, allowing much for the operation of age, I may also take into the account the frequent performances which I have seen of the same characters. But I incline to think that the Lady Macbeth, the Queen Katharine, the Constance, the Hermione, never suffered in the slightest degree down to their very latest repetition.

The year 1812 was to be distinguished by the greatest loss of the tragic stage. The play-bills now announcing

the character of the night, with melancholy accuracy stated that it would be the last time of her ever appearing in it; and it seemed almost a withdrawing of the character itself from the stage. After some little fluctuation about the farewell part, it was properly settled to be Lady Macbeth; and on the 29th of June 1812, being her own night, she took leave of the public after a very sublime performance of her greatest effort. Her nephew, Mr. Twiss, supplied the verses upon this interesting occasion, and showed how successfully he could assume the tone of a popular poet, for whose composition, indeed, it might be mistaken. I preserve what constituted the personal appeal, because the lines are very flowing and musical, and extremely well pointed to the object:—

> 'Perhaps your hearts, when years have glided by,
> And past emotions wake a fleeting sigh,
> May think on her whose lips have poured so long
> The charmèd sorrows of your Shakespeare's song;
> On her who, parting to return no more,
> Is now the mourner she but seem'd before,
> Herself subdued, resigns the melting spell,
> And breathes, with swelling heart, her long, her last farewell!'

Ad captandum, Shakespeare was right here; but it was not by the charmed sorrows of Shakespeare that Mrs. Siddons established her supremacy; and the oblivion thrown over the authors who wrote her Belvidera, her Shore, her Calista, and her Isabella covers very nearly all the tears she ever excited. 'Be just, and fear not,' is the recommendation of Shakespeare himself, and the line, with strict propriety, and equal feeling, might have stood thus:

> 'The charmèd sorrows of your native song,'

For Shakespeare services were to be performed of a different cast, and in character infinitely more sublime, and they were rendered by her so as to become the despair of admiration.

As the audience dismissed the rest of the play, when the terrible night scene of Mrs. Siddons shut in, there was only to wait till she was ready to address them, which they did with complimentary patience; and her brother came on

the stage to lead off that great partner of his toil, and by whom alone he could have accomplished the distinguishing object of his management. The retirement from what has been the source alike of fame and fortune may be a graceful, but is commonly an anxious moment. Five-and-twenty years earlier the historian of *The Decline and Fall*, at the close of the same month, had written the last words of his mighty labour. His pen dropped a few reflections upon the state of his mind at that moment, full of truth and melancholy beauty; the reader may not be displeased to see them here, and his fancy may apply them with strict truth to the noble actress whom Mr. Gibbon had so greatly admired and so constantly attended while in London: 'It was on the day, or rather night of the 27th of June 1787, between the hours of eleven and twelve, that I wrote the last lines of the last page in a summer-house in my garden.' (At Lausanne.) After laying down my pen I took several turns in a *berceau*, or covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent.[1] I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on the recovery of my freedom, and, perhaps, the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind, by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that, whatsoever might be the future date of my history, the life of the historian must be short and precarious.'

Whether the great actress regretted or not the stated calls to exertion I know not; but her kindness certainly, probably her taste, led her the year following to act Lady Macbeth for the benefit of her brother Charles. In the year 1816 she performed Katharine once more for the same kind object; and had consented to repeat her Lady Macbeth on the 8th of June of that year, to gratify the Princess

[1] The classical reader may here suspect the influence of Homer to have suggested at least as much as the lovely scenery before the historian. (see the close of the 8th *Iliad*); but perhaps the true reference may be to a similar passage in Dr. Johnson's 'Journey to the Western Islands.'—*Works*, vol. viii. p. 255, edit. 1796.

Charlotte, and her Royal Consort of Saxe-Coburg. The Princess, though ill, at first imagined she should be able to attend; but her illness increasing, she was obliged to relinquish the design, and send notice accordingly to the theatre. At first the managers thought of changing the play; but conceiving that the public would suffer disappointment at not seeing Mrs. Siddons, she readily consented to act, and seemed to have lost little of her power in the four years of retirement from the stage.

One other exertion, a public reading, is attributable to a higher motive—the desire to assist a family suffering under the premature loss of the father of it, a man of no mean powers either as actor or author. It was in the month of February 1813 that this graceful aid to the widow of Mr. Cherry was rendered by Mrs. Siddons. That lamented actor expired on the 7th of February the preceding year.

I know distinctly that the sensibility of Mr. Cherry was so hurt by some of that flippant stuff which dishonours the name of criticism among us, that he who had restored prosperity to Drury Lane Theatre by *The Soldier's Daughter* died of a wounded spirit. I have at times heard something like a positive avowal from critics that 'they wrote bitterly without spleen; that the public called for such an amusement, and that depraved appetites required poignant sauce.'

The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?

The public readings from Shakespeare at the Argyll Rooms during two seasons proceeded, as I understood, from the twofold inducements of personal gratification and an important addition to her income. I was informed by Mr. Kemble himself that his sister was not in that state of affluence that she could live unemployed without some diminution of her comforts. I am quite sure that all the kind imputations of jealousy of any other attraction, avarice, and vanity were not the motives to the exhibition, which remains to be described in its style and its effects.

As to the style, nothing could be well more simple and yet dignified. In front of what was the orchestra of the old Argyll Rooms a reading-desk with lights was placed, on which lay her book, a quarto volume printed with a

large letter. There was something remarkably elegant in the self-possession of her entrance and the manner in which she saluted the brilliant assembly before her. She assisted her distant sight by glasses, which she waved from time to time before her, when memory could not entirely be trusted, and, like the Nereïdes that attended her own Cleopatra,

'She made their bends adornings.'

Mrs. Siddons divided the reading into parts for convenience, and was the whole time standing. She was led to and from the desk by a gentleman; but few gentlemen could gracefully accomplish the office. I would not persecute any little beings by naming them at the side of this noble and seemingly inspired figure; but I will remember that one night I had the pleasure to see this duty discharged by her nephew, Mr. Twiss; and when he gently resigned her hand to retire himself, his bow of affectionate respect to his illustrious relative was, to say all in a word, fully worthy of the occasion and highly honourable to his taste.

The task to be sustained by the great actress presented extraordinary difficulties. In the first place, the plays of Shakespeare abound in male characters—the comparative number of his females is few. There is, therefore, an almost awkward effort of an elegantly dressed female to assume the vehement passions, coarse humours, and often unguarded dialogue of every variety of manly character; and it is, perhaps, easier for the male reader (at least it was to Le Texier) to aspire to the tender sweetness of the female character than for the lady (even Mrs. Siddons) to assume the passions or the follies, the agonies or the enjoyments of the other sex. The wish of Cordelia to unsex herself, even for King Lear, could not have been recommended to her imitation—all that she attempted was in the strictest decorum, fitted to her condition and her knowledge. I heard her pass slightly over the lapwing Lucio in the *Measure for Measure*, and he had lost all his grossness by the refinement of her delivery.

The reserve of her sex, too, greatly intercepted the variety which the great artist could unquestionably have

bestowed upon these readings; but such a largesse would have somewhat savoured of mimicry, the lowest of all modes of representation, which requires but the mechanical part of man, and copies not so much the passion as the exterior manners. Such a style of exhibition is incompatible with dignity, and he who felt that upon the stage Mrs. Siddons was rather lowered by comedy was rather apprehensive than solicitous of those sallies of humour that burst from the manly desk of Henderson and Le Texier. It is said of Voltaire by an exquisite judge 'that in his own theatre his declamation was fashioned to the pomp and cadence of the old stage, and he expressed the enthusiasm of poetry rather than the feelings of nature.' The charm of versification forces something like this from every public reader of Shakespeare. The Witches of Mrs. Siddons accordingly were poetical creations; the organs of destiny, the ministers of darkness, beings resolving 'into air, into thin air,' and whose language seemed to wander from that element alone, unimpressed, at least, by any organs that were human. She divined a meaning in the poet beyond his words, and it was not like a creature of earth's mould that she delivered the following lines:—

> 'Double, double toil and trouble;
> Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.'

On the stage, where the 'Weird Sisters' are necessarily consigned to actual persons and positive habiliments, the charm is dispelled; for the imagination has no picture to paint, no mystery to develop.

However, I entirely concur with Capell in the following estimate of Shakespeare's Witches: 'With regard to the Witches' persons the poet's notion is uniform: his Witches are the Witches of his own time and country, without mixture of Scaldic or of Roman ideas; bating that he borrows the name of 'Hecat' or 'Hecate' for the governing spirit, the 'mistress' of their enchantments, in two of his scenes, where the personage she exhibits has no image of the classical Hecate, but of the state of modern witchcraft.'

In the reading of *Othello* the general opinion seemed to be that Mrs. Siddons threw the whole force into Iago, a judicious choice, because where the cause is displayed in its utmost irresistible strength the hearer's mind is as much subdued as Othello's, and agonies impossible for mere reading to express are admitted because they are imagined. Upon the recognition by the noble Moor of the practice under which he had fallen, the exclamation 'O fool, fool, fool!' seemed to express all that sense of rashness, false inference, unguarded trust to appearances, unbounded love, and measureless despair which fill his mind at the moment when it is uttered. She has seldom been greater than she was at that moment.

Upon these and all occasions Mrs. Siddons was uniformly graceful. But she was not graceful by effort, and sacrificed nothing to become so. In this she widely differed from her brother, Mr. Kemble. I cannot think, however, that he sacrificed energy of action to grace. He rather sacrificed ease to attitude, and seemed fond of personal display; he would be on the parade when not called into the field. Points of force he had a peculiar alacrity of seizing, and an amazing power in conveying. It is by this salvo that I introduce the following anecdote which I find in the *Quarterly Review* of my life of that great actor.[1]

'There was also visible in Kemble's manner at times a sacrifice of energy of action to grace. We remember this observation being made by Mrs. Siddons herself, who admired her brother in general as much as she loved him. Nor shall we easily forget the mode in which she illustrated her meaning. She arose and placed herself in the attitude of one of the old Egyptian statues; the knees joined together and the feet turned a little inwards. She placed her elbows close to her sides, folded her hands, and held them upright, with the palms pressed to each other. Having made us observe that she had assumed one of the most constrained and therefore most ungraceful positions possible, she proceeded to recite the curse of King Lear on his undutiful offspring in a manner which made hair

[1] No. LXVII. p. 216.

rise and flesh creep, and then called on us to remark the additional effect which was gained by the concentrated energy which the unusual and ungraceful posture in itself implied.'

The reviewer himself is entitled to every attention from me: he will receive the few remarks that follow in the cordial spirit with which I am sure they are written. In the first place, then, I do not believe that any part of their delight (a severe delight) resulted from the concentrated energy of introverted toes and elbows pinned to the sides, however 'unusual and ungraceful.' There would have been more energy—aye, concentrated energy, too—if the figure had been thrown upon its knees and the hands clasped and convulsively drawn home to the bosom, which, permit me to observe, was the energetic and graceful attitude of Mr. Kemble when pronouncing that curse which harrows up every heart. As far, however, as this Egyptian figure folded the hands and pressed the palms to each other, I may be permitted to observe that it was certainly neither unusual nor ungraceful, but in fact exhibited the common and most natural sign of supplication; and this, in fact, was the reason for selecting the attitude in question.

In my opinion the admiring theorists were overwhelmed by quite other forces. The 'hair rose and the flesh crept'[1] at the agonised countenance that glared before them; at the mingling awful and piercing sounds that conveyed the execrations invented by Shakespeare:—

> 'Hear, Nature, hear!
> Dear goddess hear! Suspend thy purpose, if
> Thou didst intend to make this creature fruitful!
> Into her womb convey sterility!
> Dry up in her the organs of increase;
> And from her derogate body never spring
> A babe to honour her! If she must teem,
> Create her child of spleen; that it may live,
> And be a thwart disnatur'd torment to her!'

[1] When I read in the *Review* the words 'made hair rise and flesh creep,' I could not but fancy the phrase to have wandered from the 'Minstrel of the Borders,' whose hand also I recognised placing the 'single feather of an eagle' in the bonnet of Kemble or Macbeth: they were identified to me.

I think I can be quite sure that while the great Egyptian uttered these lines the hearers could be at no leisure to examine whether her arms had never quitted their bondage, or the feet recovered a position to which they were certainly more accustomed, energetic as it must be confessed they always were, in common with the rest of that dignified and perfect anatomy.

Nor are grace and energy of action at all opposed to each other. Constraint, affectation, mannerism are the great foes alike to both. Through the whole range of my stage recollections the most energetic things were at the same time the most truly graceful. Think of all the grand points in either brother or sister, and you will find the consent of grace and energy invariable. When the true artist is really up to the great occasion before him, the energy propels his frame to the right position, and that speaking index, the hand, announces the graceful triumph. Look at Mrs. Siddons herself in Katharine: 'Lord Cardinal! To you I speak.' Can you survey the energy and overlook the grace? Look at the oath in the 'Trois Horaces' by David, and bow before the union of the two great principles.

But to close with the recitations, or readings, to whichever class the beautiful efforts of Mrs. Siddons are assigned. For the sake of any future exhibition of this sort I will notice one happy effect, accidental or designed (probably the latter), which should invariably enter among the preparations of the apartment. A large red screen formed what painters would call a background to the figure of the charming reader. She was dressed in white, and her dark hair *à la Grecque* crossed her temples in full masses. Behind the screen a light was placed, and, as the head moved, a bright circular irradiation seemed to wave around its outline, which gave to a classic mind the impression that the priestess of Apollo stood before you uttering the inspiration of the deity in immortal verse. But such oracles have long been dumb.

> 'Apollo from his shrine
> Can no more divine;
> No nightly trance, or breathèd spell
> Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell.'

Her noble figure on such occasions may be accurately conceived from Sir Thomas Lawrence's whole-length of Mrs. Siddons reading her favourite poem, the *Paradise Lost*. The picture was painted for her friend Mrs. Fitz-Hugh, and is a very sublime effort of the great artist.

Perhaps I ought not to quit my subject without trying the effect of the pen in delineating the person of Mrs. Siddons, and the charm that certainly accompanied her through every era of her public life. It is fortunately done to my hands by a foreign writer of her own sex, and I shall annex it in the original language, claiming only the praise for first presenting to the British nation so eloquent a description and so admirable a likeness :—

'Elle était grande et de belle taille, mais de cette grandeur qui n'épouvante point, et ne sert qu'à la bonne mine. Elle avait le teint fort beau, les cheveux d'un châtain clair, le nez très-bien fait, la bouche bien taillée, l'air noble, doux, enjoué, modeste, et pour rendre sa beauté plus parfaite, les plus beaux yeux du monde. Ils étaient noirs, brillants, doux, passionnés, pleins d'esprit. Leur éclat avait je ne sais quoi qu'on ne saurait exprimer. La mélancolie douce y paraissait quelquefois avec tous les charmes qui la suivent. L'enjouement s'y faisait voir à son tour, avec tous les attraits que la joie peut inspirer. Son esprit était fait exprès pour sa beauté, grand, doux, agréable. Elle parlait juste et naturellement, de bonne grâce et sans affectation. Elle savait le monde et mille choses dont elle ne faisait pas vanité. Elle avait mille appas inévitables ; de sorte qu'unissant les charmes de la vertu à ceux de la beauté et de l'esprit, on pouvait dire qu'elle méritait l'admiration qu'on eut pour elle.'

The reader will be delighted, I have no doubt, with so fine a likeness, and require only to be told the name of the fair and eloquent writer. But it is with pride and pleasure I inform him that for this portrait Mrs. Siddons never sat, however striking the resemblance. It is the sketch, still, of one of the greatest and best of women—of Madame de Maintenon, by her friend Mademoiselle de Scudéry.

I have now conducted this great performer through the whole of her professional existence, and if I could flatter

myself that I had fully accomplished my design, have delivered to the world a monument to her honour.

But no one can be more sensible than myself that our wishes are the children of the imagination, and that their execution must be bounded by our power.

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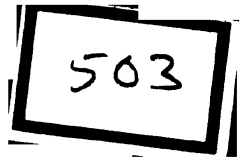
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